

The Rock – Chapter 10 – Spare Parts and More

The Abrams is a rugged tank and the Hellfire is a powerful missile. They were never intended to come together in this manner. However the pilots had the good sense or bad luck not to destroy all of the tanks. A tank with a broken tread is just as disabled, in many respects, as a tank with a dead crew. And, the pilots doubted that the tanks were crewed up anyway. The people hauled all 40 tanks back to Whites City and began to rebuild and/or repair those they could salvage. They were able to restore 18 units to 100 percent operating condition. This gave Derek 50 tanks in his command. The remaining 22 units were short one thing or another, sometimes important, like a turret and sometimes as insignificant as not having a complete set of radios for what would have been tank 19.

Twelve of the turrets were destroyed, but that meant that if Derek could get sufficient spare parts, he could build his fleet to 60 tanks. It was worth a trip to Ft. Hood for parts and to the airport for more JP8. The trip was, not surprisingly, successful. But when all the tanks were rebuilt, Derek had a bit of an organization problem. Since a Platoon has 4 tanks and Derek had 60 tanks, it followed that he had 15 Platoons of tanks. Now was that 5 Companies of 3 Platoons or 3 Companies of 5 Platoons? And, with the Headquarters Company at Rattlesnake Springs plus the 4 Infantry Companies, a Company of Artillery and an Air Detachment, any way you sliced it he had 8 or 9 Companies, which was 2 Battalions and 2 Battalions made a Regiment. “Screw it,” he thought and pinned the Star back on.

“I thought Bush made you a Lt. Col.,” Gary said when he saw the star.

“He did, but I figured out that we have 8 Companies, not 4 and decided to reorganize the forces in 2 Battalions. Since that gave me a Regiment, I decided to be a General again. Anyway Dad, it’s not like we’re getting paid or Bush is around anymore.”

“Who is the President?” Gary asked.

“I’m not so sure we have one anymore,” Derek said. “Bush went around trying to get everything organized and just up and resigned. He even asked me if I wanted to be President, remember?”

“Yeah, you should have taken him up on it,” Gary laughed. “Then you’d be the Commander in Chief.”

“I’m not so sure I’m not anyway Dad.” Derek joined in the laughter.

“So are you going to have a spring campaign and fight the forces of evil?” Gary kidded.

“Actually, I thought I’d have a bottle of that home brew and kick back for a while,” Derek sighed.

o

With the winter coming later and looking like it might not be as bad as the previous year, Ron, Gary and Clarence decided to get out and try a little hunting. A nice piece of venison would taste awfully good at Thanksgiving. They dug around and found the 10 round mags for the M1A's and loaded them with soft points. Of course they never went anywhere far from the Springs without their little BOB's and a couple of 20-round mags of FMJ.

The game had been picking up, perhaps because of the weather, and they had the idea that a big old mule deer would walk right out in front of them and make their life easy. Right. Ron was dragging a sled to haul the deer home on, they knew that they would have one any minute. Maybe if they'd gotten off the road and into the boonies, they might have seen a deer, but it was hard enough walking on the road and it only had a light coating of snow, maybe 3".

You'd think that 3 old men, the youngest of whom was 71, would have had better sense than to try and walk very far. About an hour into the hunt, Gary's neuropathic feet were killing him and his back wasn't fairing much better. He called a halt to the hunt so he could rest his back and feet for a minute or two. He saw a stump about 10 yards off the road and started to tread the deep snow to get him a seat. With realizing it, he stepped into a hole and began to fall. As he went down, his trigger finger slipped into the trigger guard and pushed forward on the safety, releasing it. When he hit the ground, he involuntarily squeezed the trigger. Kaboom, came the sharp report from his rifle. Ron and Clarence had been looking away and hadn't seen him fall.

"What the f..." Ron started to say, turning toward Gary.

"Gary, are you all right?" Clarence called out.

"Didn't shoot myself, if that's what you mean," Gary replied thought clenched teeth. "But I think I broke my leg."

"What the hell were you shooting at?" Ron asked.

"That was an accident," Gary said, "I explain later. Help me up you guys."

"Give me the radio and I'll call for help," Ron said.

"I don't have the flippen' radio, you do," Gary managed to get out.

"I don't have any radio, quit clowning around and give me the radio," Ron insisted.

"I don't have the radio," Gary groaned.

“I think that we have established that we don’t have a radio,” Clarence said, “Shut up Ron and help me get Gary to the sled.”

o

Although it wasn’t more than 15 feet to the sled, it was a very noisy journey with Gary hollering all the way. Had Gary made it to the log and rested, he had intended to talk them into turning back because it had started to snow and his back was killing him.

When they finally got Gary on the sled and tied down with a hank of paracord, they checked his leg. He had a single fracture of the right shinbone and it was compound, with the lower stump poking through the skin. Clarence wrapped Gary’s leg in a GI surplus field dressing and gave him 2 pain pills from the BOB’s drug bottle. They set off back to the housing tract with Ron pulling the sled.

“How far have we come?” Ron panted.

“150 or 200 yards,” Clarence said, “You tired already?”

“You pull for a while,” Ron said, breathlessly.

“This was a stupid idea, going hunting,” Clarence said, “It’s starting to snow real heavy like, too. Whose idea was this hunt anyway?”

“Gary’s,” Ron answered, “You know, the guy who forgot the radio.”

“I heard that,” Gary groaned. “I didn’t forget the radio, I told you last night to bring it. And some venison would have tasted good for Thanksgiving.”

“Is THAT what you were mumbling about last night?” Ron asked. “Shake a leg Clarence; it’s starting to really come down.”

The men hadn’t come more than a quarter of mile. It was as if the heavens had opened up and was dumping snow by the truckload. Then the wind started to pick up. Just a little at first, but by the time they had towed that heavy sled over the slippery road that short distance, Clarence was winded too. It was more a problem of footing than anything else. No sweat, they were only about a mile, more or less, from the housing tract. Except, for every 50 or so yards they covered the wind speed seemed to increase by another 5mph. Visibility was down to about 50 yards and dropping.

“Man, I can’t see anything,” Clarence complained.

“Just stay on the road, pal,” Ron said, “And we’ll be there in no time.”

“What’s taking so long?” Gary yelled.

“Shut up butthead,” Ron said, “We’re doing the best that we can. The road is slippery, the snow is coming down a foot a minute and the wind is blowing 50mph.”

The pain pills weren’t working and Gary’s leg was killing him. He knew a fast way to increase the effect of the painkillers 10 fold. Each BOB had a single 100-millileter bottle of brandy. Alcohol and Hydrocodone are synergistic, e.g., $1 + 1 = 10$. Gary knew that and was counting on the fact to relieve his pain. So he downed the shot of brandy and waited for it to kick in. Meanwhile, Ron and Clarence were having one hell of a time. The footing was getting worse, they couldn’t see 50 feet, the wind was blowing almost strong enough to knock them off their feet and they were getting tired.

o

Back at the housing tract, Derek was getting worried. The blizzard struck so suddenly and with such fury that it took everyone by surprise. He tried to contact the three old geezers by radio, but they didn’t answer. They hadn’t told anyone which way they were going either and they could have gone 2 different ways. By the time that Derek was ready to send out people to search for the men, visibility was all but zero. He had to hope that they had the good sense to go to ground and ride out the storm.

Ron and Clarence were taking turns pulling the sled with Clarence doing most of the pulling. By this time, they were completely disoriented and had no idea where they were. They had actually come about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile and were very near the housing tract. It wouldn’t be exactly correct to say that Gary was no longer in pain, but it would be correct to say that he no longer cared. The dangerous combination of the opiate and the sedative hypnotic drug (alcohol) had the desired effect; he was in lala-land. [Author’s note: Don’t try the combination, it can kill you.]

Ron and Clarence stopped for a moment to catch their collective breath. They certainly had gotten more than they had bargained for on this hunt. They were using the road to guide them and the deeper snow on the sides of the road kept them from getting off track. The two men conferred briefly and decided that they would have to find a place to hole up, medical emergency or not. They hadn’t heard a peep out of Gary in the past hour although unless he screamed, they probably couldn’t have heard him over the wind. Slightly rested, they resumed the journey, now on the lookout for a place to hole up.

The housing tract with its 10’ thick wall surrounding it gave off very little light. What light it did give off was reflected by the snow and rapidly diffused. By this time, everyone in the tract was aware of the plight of the old men and some of the old timers were comparing the blizzard to the snow of 2004. They insisted that they take 4 Humvees out to search for the men, a pair along each of the two different ways. However, by the time they got the search organized, the fickle finger of fate had dealt them a serious blow.

Old and tired as they were, Ron and Clarence had managed to pull the heavy sled back

to the housing tract and beyond. Finally, they could go no further and called a halt at a large snow bank. They cut into the snow bank to form a shelter of sorts. It wasn't much, but it would have to do. They had no idea where they were, either. To top matters off, they weren't dressed for the weather and were getting very, very cold. They pulled out their 'space blankets' and wrapped up with the shiny side facing inward to trap their body heat and waited for help.

Despite the howling wind and blowing snow, the Humvees crept along the roads looking for signs of the men. There were no tracks, the wind had seen to that and about 2½ hours later the two convoys of vehicles met each other on the backside of the loop. They had a brief radio conversation and decided to continue on their respective journeys, in effect each backtracking the other. About 2½ hours later, both pairs of vehicles were back at Rattlesnake Springs, having failed to find any sign of the three old men. Had they but known, the men were barely a ¼ mile away, holed up in a snow bank freezing their collective butts off.

The pain medication began to wear off and Gary nudged Ron. The two uninjured men wrapped Gary in his space blanket and gave him 2 Keflex 500mg antibiotic capsules and two more Vicodin ES. Gary pressed Clarence until Clarence gave up his 100-milliliter bottle of brandy. Candidly, the three of them thought they were not going to make it out of this misadventure alive and Clarence reluctantly gave Gary his bottle of brandy. Ron and Clarence each ate one of their 3,600-calorie lifeboat rations and drank two of the foil packets of water to generate body heat as much as anything else.

o

The men also carried a 3-day supply of their medications in their BOB's. Everything, that is except Gary's insulin. Gary was an insulin dependent Type II diabetic and had found over the years that he could get by without the insulin for several days. He had developed rapid cycling hypoglycemia as a result of not following doctor's orders precisely and could manage without the insulin for a time as long as he avoided fast burning carbohydrates.

Whenever he consumed the fast burning carbohydrates, Coke, is a perfect example, his blood sugar would peak and then fall off rapidly. When his blood sugar dropped below 50, Gary would get the shakes, warning him that he was beginning to go into a diabetic coma. A simple solution was to eat a food rich in fat, like peanut butter, to stabilize his blood sugar.

The brandy was one of those fast burning carbohydrates. Consequently before the Vicodin and brandy had a chance to work their magic and send Gary back to lala-land, he started to get the shakes and it wasn't from the cold. Gary had 3 MRE peanut butter packs in his BOB and ate one of the packages to stabilize his blood sugar. If there is any upside to the alcohol/Hydrocodone combination, it is that the effect is longer acting; at least, it was for Gary. He was off in lala-land by the time that the peanut butter had its life saving effect.

As quickly as the blizzard blew in, it abated. A little more than 24-hours after Gary's accident, the wind began to die downing and the snowfall lessen. Ron and Clarence struggled to get free of the blanket of snow that covered them and finally stood to see if they could tell where they were.

"Jeezus H.," Ron muttered, "Would you look at that?"

"What?" Clarence asked, turning to look the same direction as Ron.

"We went right past the tract in the storm," Ron said. "We'd better get Gar-Bear some medical treatment pronto."

The snow was butt deep on a 9' Indian, but they managed to pull the sled back to the tract. Ron and Clarence ended up in the Clinic, wrapped in warm blankets and being given the once over by Ruth. The doctor took Gary into surgery to repair the compound fracture. All three of the men had avoided severe frostbite by the narrowest of margins. In the recovery room, Gary came out of the general anesthetic slowly; no doubt the effect of the anesthetic compromised by the effects of his efforts to contain his pain.

"I guess this means we aren't going to have venison for Thanksgiving, huh?" Gary croaked.

"I've got your venison right here," Ron said shaking a fist in Gary's face.

"Fried chicken sounds good," Gary muttered and dropped off to sleep.

o

Relieved at the three old geezer's safe return, Derek resumed his analysis of their military situation. Should they remain there in southern New Mexico and wait for the bad guys to come to them, assuming there were more bad guys out there, or should they seek them out and destroy them? He wasn't certain and he had all winter to consult with his commanders.

His gut told him that they would be better off in the long run if they took the fight to the bad guys rather than wait for them to attack. On the other hand, Derek had built his Army more as a defensive organization than as an offensive organization. Going on the offensive would mean that he needed to get more of the M1000 transports and should consider adding some of those LAV's or Bradley's to his equipment.

Derek put the word out to his company commanders to consider the issue and get back to him after the first of the year. He scheduled a staff meeting for January 15, 2015. Until then, he wanted to assess their needs. If they were going to have to fight, at least, he felt, it should serve a dual purpose. About the only supplies left in Albuquerque and Denver were fuel supplies, so if they needed anything else, they must pick another city

to raid and then hope like hell that there was something left to take. After nearly eleven years, he wasn't so sure that would be the case. It was probably either go further north or forget it.

As he considered his options, Derek made the assumption that any city south of Denver had probably been picked through pretty good. That limited his options and pretty much eliminated all of the cities in California, Nevada, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, southern Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia and probably Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey. Major cities north of those states might still have food while anything south had probably been picked over or was occupied.

The closest large cities to their location were Salt Lake City, Cheyenne, Omaha, Des Moines, Minneapolis, Madison and Chicago. Of those, the first 4 were the closest and perhaps the best bet. Salt Lake City was iffy, in his opinion, because he'd heard, rather than knew, that the Mormons were quite the survivalists as a group. Of the remaining three, Cheyenne, Omaha and Des Moines seemed to be the best bet.

At least, if they went to Omaha and Des Moines, he would be on familiar ground and better able to wage a battle, if it came to that. But Cheyenne was the closest, so he decided to propose those three cities in the order of closeness, as potential scavenging targets.

He also knew that there was a major military base, F.E. Warren AFB, near Cheyenne, so perhaps he could pick up military stores. All three cities were also on I-80 and they could check other cities along the way. One final consideration was that none of the three cities would necessarily be the base of operations for any bad guys because in his experience, they tended to prefer the warmer climates.

All of this was, of course, supposition and it depended as much on what they needed as anything. To that end, he got with Aaron and asked him to evaluate their supply situation and prepare a list of what they needed, also for the January 15th meeting.

o

Gary was still in a cast at Thanksgiving and not in the best humor. It seemed that the good doctor had run some blood tests and Gary's Hemoglobin A1c was elevated, indicating that he had been running high blood sugar for an extended time. The solution was simple enough, a rigidly controlled diabetic diet, but Gary wasn't enjoying it one bit.

While the shelf life of some of Gary's favorite things, like Coke for example, was virtually indefinite given proper storage conditions, other things that Gary could substitute, like diet Coke, had a limited shelf life and had gone bad years before. Gary had taken advantage of most people not knowing of his diabetes to get the things he liked from the supply center. However, the doctor had given strict orders to everyone, especially Sharon, not to let Gary have his little vices. The doctor might be right, but that put him high on Gary's list and it wasn't Gary's list of his friends.

One item that always made the lists was cigarettes. Maybe the people in the east had them and maybe not, but there wasn't much commerce among the states. And, although they grew their own wheat in the caverns, it never met the demand for flour so wheat and other grains were always on the list. The same could be said for sugar and certain spices.

Thus, before he even had a list from Aaron, Derek had made a general list of things they probably needed. Another common item was florescent tubes, both the warm and cool white varieties. Although the tubes usually last even after the ends began to darken, their efficiency dropped as soon as the ends darkened and the plant growth fell off. While they could grow hay for the cattle, the hogs needed feed and agricultural grain elevators were also frequently on the list.

Aaron and some of the others were talking about moving the entire settlement further north to eastern Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska or even Iowa so they could get into agricultural production. As far as that discussion went, the three old men seemed to favor eastern Colorado because it was the closest, with Kansas coming in a popular second place.

One of the advantages to the possibility of moving was the fact that everyone lived in a doublewide mobile home and with a little work, they could move their homes by merely splitting them into their two sections, reattaching the running gear and hauling them. One of the first things Aaron had put on his list was to locate a new area for their community.

◦

Christmas came and went and at the January 15th meeting, the group of military commanders and the civilians decided to head for Cheyenne and scout eastern Colorado. They wanted about 5 sections of good farming land to settle. They decided to take ½ of their small Army and leave the second half behind to guard the communities.

Aaron's list included everything that Derek had anticipated and a few he hadn't, like rechargeable flashlight batteries, for example. The decision was also made at that meeting that if a suitable farming location could be found, they would enlist the assistance of the area residents to help the Rattlesnake Springs community move.

Since it was impractical to move the 3 million gallons of diesel fuel, the fuel would be left behind for the communities to compensate them for their assistance in making the move. They would also leave behind much of the equipment housed in the caverns for the benefit of the New Mexico residents and replace that equipment with new equipment they hoped to scavenge.

On April 1st, the party set off, accompanied by 2 infantry companies, 30 tanks on M1000 transports, and half the air detachment. They stopped in Albuquerque long

enough to fill a tanker with diesel and two others with Jet A from the Albuquerque airport. They scrounged an HF Ham radio rig and a high quality base station antenna that they could mount on an extendable mast. Properly outfitted to maintain communications with the Springs, they continued to Denver.

In Denver, a small group of men split off with a platoon accompanying them for security. The remainder of the party continued to Cheyenne. Cheyenne hadn't been picked over too badly and they managed to pick up everything they needed, including 24 doublewide homes. They turned back to the south and were met by the agricultural scouting party when they arrived back in Denver.

The Battalion of military people hadn't been needed to this point, perhaps because they were along and any would be attackers simply left them alone. During the two-week trip from Denver to Cheyenne, a few families had already moved into Denver.

The scouting party had good news, too. They had traveled east from Denver on I-70 to US 36 and had located a suitable area of farmland east and south of Last Chance where US 36 and state 71 junction. A company of infantry was sent to the area to secure the land and they returned to Rattlesnake Springs. The mobile homes picked up in Cheyenne were sent along with the infantry company and they said that they would set them up wherever the scouting party wanted them. Some of the supplies were also diverted to the new home site.

o

Most everyone in the area was willing to pitch in and help the people move. In fact several of the families wanted to accompany the people when they went. The community center contents were loaded aboard semi-trailers and crews began to dismantle the community center building and the warehouse building. More folks pitched in and helped load the supplies while still others began to dismantle the homes. The residents took temporary refuge in the cavern while the homes were split and hauled.

There were so many things that had to be done. A well digger was sent to Colorado accompanied by Bob to put in a pair of new 6" wells for their new community. A concrete contractor and a portable plant were sent to put in foundations for the homes. The list of people sent ahead was large.

During June, the group of fifty homes was pulled to Colorado accompanied by the group which had seen to their disassembly. Shortly thereafter, semis left with the community center and warehouse buildings. The work went on from sunrise to sunset and by mid-July; everything they were taking had been hauled to Colorado. The empty propane tanks had not been filled and they were moved early on to the new community which they had come to call 'The Farm'. In the end, they only moved 20 of the propane tanks and the 12 propane delivery trucks were kept busy transferring the propane.

In Colorado, foundations and slabs were installed for the doublewides using the con-

tractor's equipment from New Mexico and ready-mix trucks recovered from Denver. The two wells were put in, the warehouse erected and the food stored in the warehouse. The Community Center and Warehouse were located in the center of the new community and space was left to erect two additional warehouse sized buildings. The homes were reassembled around the buildings and the housing tract well had been dug at the site of one of the new buildings yet to be erected. By Labor Day, the move was complete. Before he returned to New Mexico, the contractor poured the slabs for the new buildings.

They hadn't allowed their livestock herds to grow much, confined as they were to the cavern. Since they were going to be farmers now, they planned for a substantial herd expansion and built a large chicken house, hog house and a barn ½ mile to the east of the new housing tract. The well digger had put in a second well for the livestock eliminating the need to run water pipes. They set a generator and one propane tank to service the farm buildings.

o

Division of the military equipment proved to be difficult. Derek insisted on keeping the 32 M1A3 Abrams and left the other 28 tanks and the 12 damaged tank chassis in New Mexico. The air detachment was divided into two units and one stayed in New Mexico and the other went to Colorado, to be based, initially, at the Denver airport. The two communities established radio communications and a mutual defense pact.

The distance between the two communities was about 455 air miles and about 550 road miles. The aircraft could manage the trip only by stopping in Albuquerque to refuel and the remainder of the military would require about 12-13 hours of non-stop road travel to make the trip. Consequently, both groups agreed to maintain recon patrols in their areas to keep them advised on any possible trouble that might require assistance from the other.

While the arrangement was less than perfect, at least each group had someone to call upon, just in case. Altogether, the New Mexico group had accumulated 120 fuel tankers. These were evenly divided among the communities, as were the 12 propane delivery trucks. There was still some propane in the Denver area, but Aaron and the residents of The Farm decided to secure their future fuel from Cheyenne. Two massive standby generator sets, capable of producing a total of two megawatts of power were located in Denver, but unfortunately both units ran on diesel. Still, The Farm had some diesel, gasoline and 600,000-gallons of propane.

Since they lacked a fence around the new community, the 32 Abrams were spaced around the new community, 8 to a side, to provide security. While Aaron, Bob and Jacob scrounged additional buildings from Denver, Derek sent his people back to Ft. Carson to pick up 32 M2 Bradley's, additional Hummers and any remaining munitions, especially 25mm ammo. They were lucky in that regard, having not previously taken any

of the Bradley's or 25mm ammo. If their Army at The Farm had any deficiencies it was a lack of people.

o

The original cattle had grown old and had been replaced through their breeding program. They had a single bull and a dozen cows. Likewise, they had limited themselves to a single boar and a dozen sows. When it came to the chickens, they hadn't limited the flock nearly as much and were producing large quantities of eggs.

There seemed to be ample supplies of grain in nearby elevators so feed for the livestock wouldn't be much of a problem. Farms in the area provided old hay and straw. It might not have a lot of nutritional value left, but it gave the animals the bulk they needed in their diet and they figured out how to operate the milling equipment at a nearby elevator and grind fresh feed for the livestock.

While the winters came earlier up here in Colorado, they were able to complete the final two building shells before the first snowfall. Intended as additional storage and commercial buildings, they could work on the insides during the winter. The bakery was temporarily housed in the main warehouse. They had a lot of loose ends, but in general terms their community was habitable and it had so much more potential than southern New Mexico. They had five sections of flat, rich earth to grow crops on. They could get new farm equipment from abandoned dealerships in the Denver area and needed but one small thing for the coming year. Farmers!

The folks held their first community meeting in the community center and it was uniformly agreed to advertise on the Ham net for people with an agricultural background to join their community, military veterans would be given preference. They might as well kill two birds with one stone. At that same meeting they decided to make locating additional doublewides a high priority for the coming year. Although the community was small, less than 80 homes, they wanted to grow much larger.

The Rock – Chapter 11 – A Growing Community

The problem The Farm faced was, simply put, a people problem. While they had all of the space they could use for the foreseeable future, their population was only 201. The call for new residents on the Ham net was productive, however, and they had nearly 50 additional families willing to relocate to The Farm. That gave them a real housing crunch!

As weather permitted, Aaron and the others ranged far and wide locating new or nearly new doublewides. They much preferred the new homes because it eliminated one step, the dismantling of the homes. Over the course of the winter, having traveled well into Nebraska, Wyoming and Kansas, they managed to locate and haul back 76 additional homes.

The farm implement dealerships in the area had proven to be a veritable storehouses of new farm equipment. A swap of the diesel fuel and lubricants together with a new battery was all it took to get the new tractors running. Since some of the people had been raised on farms, they at least had a good idea of equipment they needed.

Tractors, plows, discs and drags were hauled in and rototillers, balers, planters, combines and wagons were added to the mix. Derek sent a unit back to Iowa to raid Pioneer and Garst to get non-hybrid corn seed stock. They had ample stocks of wheat, but needed alfalfa seed and oats.

Arrangements were made over the radio for the concrete contractor to return to Colorado early on and put in foundations for the new doublewides. To compensate the people from New Mexico, The Farm agreed to share their agricultural output. Since that meant that the New Mexicans wouldn't need to work so hard to secure food supplies, an agreement was easily reached.

One other issue came up, the diesel fuel stored in the bunkers and the remaining propane. They agreed The Farm could empty the larger bunker of diesel and take a major share of diesel. Gasoline was omitted from the agreement but PRI-D and PRI-G were divided among the two groups.

o

Much of the work building the infrastructure of The Farm had been done with an eye to the future. One example was the septic field. Although they had only 74 homes the first year, they put in a septic system that could easily handle the effluent from 500 homes. Although that had produced a sharp debate, Aaron and Bob persuaded most of the people that going large in the beginning meant less work in the future. Aside from erecting the new doublewides, the community had other issues to address. They needed water storage and tanks for their diesel. Some thought was given to locating and installing alternative energy sources for electricity and to heat the water. It was going to be a long summer.

Although they had just shy of one million gallons of diesel fuel, they considered it impractical to try and put in enough tanks to store the entire supply of fuel underground. They opted to install the largest tanks they could find in two locations, one near the housing area and a second by the farm buildings. They ended up with most of the tanks located near the generators. The propane delivery trucks were kept busy all summer hauling propane from Cheyenne. Thirty-six families decided to relocate from New Mexico to Colorado and they had 52 farm families who had applied and been accepted into the community. This left them a bit short on housing and the scramble was on to find more of the doublewides.

‘God helps him who helps himself’. The residents of The Farm took that both ways. They worked hard, meeting the spirit of the message and they freely helped themselves to whatever they could find. The 238 new residents of The Farm were fully housed and hard at work as spring turned into summer in 2016.

Derek had the bodies he needed to fill in the ranks of his military units and the community was beginning to take on the look of any other community. Rather than erect grain storage and other facilities, they took advantage of the grain elevators and such in the area. It meant locating extra generators and relocating fuel tankers, but that was one hell of a lot easier than building new buildings.

Although most of their personal vehicles were old, they were relatively low mileage. They had agreed eons ago to limit themselves to diesel pickups, eliminating the need for gasoline. About the only things they needed to keep their vehicles running were tires, motor oil, various filters, belts, brakes and new batteries. Warehouses in the Denver area met those needs.

Other warehouses became the source of alternative energy. They found PV panels by the pallet load. They also determined that the panels were manufactured in New Mexico. Connected to a charge controller and a HUGE battery bank consisting of 60 batteries each home could provide its own power. The batteries proved more difficult to find, however and they resorted to all manner of deep cycle batteries with golf cart batteries being the easiest to find. The solar water-heating project proved to be more difficult and they decided to put that off to the following year.

o

The homes at The Farm all faced south intentionally. While they weren’t widely spaced, there was room for a front yard, if you wanted one, and room in the back for a deck or whatever. When the utilities were put in, lines were run for water, sewer, electricity and communications. Each home was wired into the computer network, now housed in one of the extra community buildings and Aaron, Bob and Jacob had seen to a telephone system connecting all of the homes. The streets were two lanes wide, but offered no space for parking. They surfaced them with an asphalt-like mix of pea gravel and road tar.

At one of the community meetings, someone suggested putting a front porch on each of the homes; specifically roofed decks. The roof could support the solar water heating panels and would provide shade for the front of the homes. They considered that idea a winner and voted to do it the following summer. The people were learning to adapt to their new circumstances and the electricity generating roofs allowed them to take one of the two large generators off line. And they were able to further economize by changing out all of the incandescent light bulbs to florescent bulbs in their homes using the screw-in florescent bulbs.

Improvise. Adapt. Overcome. Gunny Highway's motto became the motto of The Farm. Someone also suggested wind turbines and they added those to the list. Maybe, the three old geezers suggested, they could get some from either Palm Springs or Tehachapi out in California. If they could limit their consumption of hydrocarbon based fuels, they should be good scavenging until the petroleum industry was back up and running.

They hadn't bothered with a 10' thick wall, the area to enclose was simply too large. The New Mexican contractor had brought a second crew and while one crew put in the slabs, the second crew put up a 1' thick wall. The wall was erected using slip form construction and continuously poured 24/7 until it was completed.

The new compound area had room for 500 homes; a number arrived at based on the capacity of the septic system. As the contractor completed his work a fleet of trucks arrived and were filled with grain from the elevators, keeping the slate even. The folks at the farm butchered all but thirteen of the gilts, increasing their pork herd to 24 sows and 2 boars. They kept the heifers and butchered the steers, but weren't in a position to market beef for another year or two. The chickens were another matter entirely. By forcing a reduction of egg consumption, they managed to grow hundreds of extra chickens.

A trip to a warehouse in Denver solved the problem they had with storing the extra meat they produced during 2016. Every building generated its own electricity, or most of it, and the large community buildings had such big roofs, they were generating most of the electricity consumed by the equipment inside. Jacob took advantage of the nearness of Denver and a crew scoured the city looking for diesel generators to replace the two propane guzzlers. Denver had both a Cummins and a Koehler in the form of Rocky Mountain Power Generation and the wholesalers records revealed three dealers in the Denver area: Standby Power Service, Wagner Equipment and Stewart and Stevenson.

Between the wholesaler and the three dealers, Aaron, Bob and Jacob were able to assemble a 3-megawatt, five diesel generator modular system before spring of 2017. The real beauty of the new system was the interface that allowed it to be connected to the computer network and controlled from any computer terminal in the tract, if you knew the password. And, most of the time, they could get by with a single 600kw generator.

o

Maybe it was the cold winter or maybe it was being in wide-open spaces or maybe it was just the whatever; but most of the younger women and all of the livestock of breeding age were expecting in the spring. The Farm was looking forward to a population explosion of another kind.

The New Mexican contractor was back in Colorado with both crews and since there was no wall to build this year began to put in foundations and slabs at an amazing rate. A building contractor also came up this year and after locating the lumber he needed in Denver, began to put up those porch roofs at a rapid rate, sometimes as many as 4 or 5 in a single day.

Even more surprisingly, 17 families who had relocated to New Mexico after the strike showed up wanting to join the community. These folks had an interesting assortment of skills, including a mechanic, two carpenters, two plumbers, three farmers, a baker, a butcher, four retired 20 plus year veterans, and three former cops. They didn't find a candlestick maker. Better still, they had located and dragged along their own doublewide mobile homes.

They were moved in and pitching in to help even before Aaron and the scroungers returned with additional doublewides. The farmers had a jump on spring, having plowed their fields in the fall, and things were simply sailing along. The Farm seemed to be seized by a new energy. Even Ron, Gary and Clarence were out and about, Gary finally having been able to give up the cane. Aaron, Bob and Jacob had presented them with golf carts and they had the run of the place, 'supervising' as it were. The three old geezers were acting 10 years younger than their actual age.

The Farm was becoming a small town, and a restaurant counter had been added to the community center over the winter using equipment also scrounged from Denver. The three of them fell into sort of a routine of their own, meeting for breakfast, 'supervising' throughout the morning, taking lunch at the café and supervising throughout the afternoon. Their wives were happy to see them reenergized and out from under foot.

Derek and his fulltime military types made the rounds of the military installations in the Denver area collecting additional munitions and equipment. The air detachment made a trip back to Ft. Hood for more Longbows and Kiowa's. They were met by their opposites from New Mexico who had continued the search for Apache and Kiowa air crews. In the end, 4 more Apaches and 2 additional Kiowa's flew back to New Mexico and 12 Apaches and 6 more Kiowa's made the trip to Denver. Six 10-ton military vehicles hauled repair parts, four to Denver and two to New Mexico. While the primary purpose of both military units remained defensive in nature, they presumed that they would only need to implement the mutual aid pact in the direst of circumstances.

Unbeknown to Derek, the New Mexicans had returned to Ft. Hood and picked up additional M1A2SEPs. They had the larger, better-equipped Army of the two communities. They had to scrounge some on their own to get additional munitions for the tanks, since Ft. Hood had been cleaned out, but they had excellent teachers and they managed very

well. The New Mexicans had implemented other changes and now had a regiment of their own. Their artillery was back up to 18 M119A2 cannons, too.

o

In many respects, the two communities had adopted the posture the Swiss and Israelis had been famous for. Every member of both communities of fighting age (15-45) was a reserve member of the armed force. Vast stores of munitions, equipment and military garb had been recovered and everyone had a full set of everything. Helmets, Interceptor Vests with plates, magazines, and so forth were issued and kept at home in both communities. The more dangerous items, like grenades and things that little hands could play with were only maintained at the community level, but the New Mexicans and the Coloradoans had the ultimate 'rapid response' forces. Derek had even been up to Cheyenne to F.E. Warren AFB and had cleaned out anything of use there.

The scroungers from Colorado had done well on locating more doublewides and together with the 17 homes dragged in by the people from New Mexico, by mid-summer over 60 new homes were assembled or being assembled. Mid-summer meant the 4th of July. This was still the United States of America, even if the federal government was strangely missing in action. Besides, everyone needed a rest, so a massive barbeque picnic was planned at The Farm.

"This place is really coming together," Gary observed. "Has anyone been to California to see about wind turbines yet?"

"Nah, partner," Ron replied, "Aaron said they had to do what they could about homes this year and try to get a few ahead. If they could accomplish that, he claimed they would go looking for wind turbines next year."

"I don't see that they're going to get enough homes anytime soon," Clarence observed, "We have space for 500 homes. What are we up to now?"

"Let's see," Ron figured out loud. "There were 162 homes at the beginning of spring. Then we got in those 17 families from New Mexico and Aaron and his bunch have pulled in 46 additional homes. If my math is right, that's 225 homes."

"A couple of more years and were going to have to think about a second compound," Gary speculated. "And, if we put in a wind farm for electricity, we're going to have to expand the size of The Farm by a few sections of farm ground."

"You must have been asleep at the switch, Gar-Bear," Ron laughed. "They added a sixth section last year and have three more under cultivation this year. The Farm now covers nine sections."

"Well, who would have thought that it would take the better part of 18 months just to get over a broken bone?" Gary asked.

“We aren’t exactly spring chickens, Gary,” Clarence observed, “You’re lucky you healed at all.”

“I’d better hurry up and get my bottle of homebrew before that doctor comes along and tells me it isn’t on my diet,” Gary laughed.

“How are you doing on that diet?” Clarence asked.

“It’s almost funny Clarence,” Gary explained. “I followed it religiously for about 9 months; lost weight down to 152 pounds. Then the doctor started to worry because I was so skinny. So I said to hell with the diet and went back to my normal eating, more or less. Got my weight back up to 170 and he was real happy. But then he started raising hell about my Hemoglobin A1c again. There’s no pleasing the man. How are the two of you making out with those heart conditions?”

“Same as always,” Ron said, “Angioplasty every three years to unplug me and then pretend to follow the doctor’s orders for a while.”

“I just take my pills and follow the diet,” Clarence said. “I haven’t been clogged up since back before the strike and I have my diabetes controlled with pills. How are your feet doing?”

“They been numb so long that I’ve gotten used to it,” Gary laughed. “But I take care of them so I don’t end up getting one cut off.”

“Not to change the subject, but are they going to have enough of those PV panels to cover 500 homes?” Ron inquired.

“I was talking to Jacob about that,” Gary replied. “The panels don’t seem to be the problem. They have enough in Denver for a lot of homes. The problem seems to be getting 60 batteries for each home.”

“I suppose there is a limit to everything, even scrounging,” Ron admitted.

“The word on the Ham net is that a lot of factories have started back up in the southern states and petroleum production is coming back online,” Gary announced. “Of course with so much heavy industry in the north and so few people left in the country, who knows how long it will be before the country is producing everything it needs.”

“What else do you hear on the Ham net?” Clarence asked, curious.

“You mean like the roving band of bad guys who would rather steal from people than scrounge for themselves?” Gary asked. “The country hasn’t changed all that much Clarence, that’s why we need our own standing Army.”

“How big a band?” Clarence asked.

“Estimates range from 1,000 to 3,000. I guess that nobody knows for sure,” Gary answered. “Doesn’t much matter though, we have them outnumbered.”

“How do you figure that?” Ron snapped. “There are barely 600 of us.”

“Plus 32 Abram M1A3s, 32 Bradley M2s, artillery and about 450 highly trained troops,” Gary replied. “And we have 16 Apaches’ and 8 Kiowa Warriors now. I sure as hell wouldn’t want to be a bad guy attacking this community. Derek has one unit down at Ft. Hood right now picking up another 15 artillery pieces.”

“We’re still awfully light on people,” Ron observed. “I mean a tank crew is four people and a Bradley takes three. That uses up half of our fighting force right there. Then there’s the artillery.”

“It’s not as bad as you think, partner,” Gary said. “Used as static defensive equipment the Abrams and Bradley’s can get by with two people per vehicle.”

“Still...” Ron began.

“Let’s get a beer before that doctor shows up,” Gary cut him off.

The north wall set back from the road about ¼ mile. All around the compound, Derek had been setting a layered defense. Furthest away was a clearly marked minefield about 200 yards wide. Behind the minefield, were staggered banks of Claymores, wired to be set off individually or every fifth mine in banks. Behind the minefield were the Bradley’s, 15 to a side and behind them the Abrams, 8 to a side.

The intentions were to yank down the minefield warning signs and button up in the event of an attack. The artillery was positioned inside of the compound near the park that made up the very center of the compound. Given the arrangement, 24 artillery pieces could begin to repel invaders at a range of 11 kilometers with the Abrams picking up the slack at 4 kilometers. Depending upon the direction the attack came from, as many as 16 of the Abrams could be brought to bear on intruders from any given direction.

◦

The minefield was sown with the M-16APM, the so-called Bouncing Betty. When activated, the mines rose to a height of about 1.5 meters and exploded. With a blast radius of about 30’, the mines were designed to kill more than one person at a time. Although they had made an exact map of the mine placement, the grass had been allowed to grow in the ¼ mile ring around the compound and no one could be certain exactly where those three little prongs were sticking up for each mine. All the better for a defen-

sive installation. The compound had gates that were closed, more to keep the children in than intruders out. A second gate, made of 2 layers of ¾" steel plate could be swung into position in a defensive situation. An observation tower rose from the center of the park nearly 60' into the air and was manned by a single individual 24/7.

The only clear path through the minefields was the road. On the wall overlooking the road, Derek had mounted a Mk-19 and a pair of Ma Deuces. Since the road went straight through the tract and exited on the south, a similar arrangement existed above the south gate. If ever there was a killing zone, it was those roads leading into the tract from the north and the south. The Hummers, by the way, were parked in a row between the Bradley's and the Abrams and ringed the compound with the Mk-19's, Ma Deuces and TOW missiles. It would take an armored Regiment to get into the compound, and they would have to be pretty lucky.

o

Over the course of the afternoon, the 4th of July picnic was a romping success. Aaron had managed to get some fireworks from a Denver manufacture's warehouse and after sunset, they ended the very enjoyable day with the first fireworks display in years. In many ways, Gary felt the celebration was reminiscent of 4th of July celebrations he remembered from the 1950's. Well, maybe. There was no boat on the river to watch the fireworks display up close, but still, the fried chicken, potato salad and watermelon brought back memories of a simpler time. There probably weren't many among them who were old enough to remember the 1950's, Gary realized. It was a far simpler time for a young boy growing up in rural Iowa.

In the days after the Second World War, America had been far less complicated. Crime was primarily a function of big cities. Gary could remember the awe he'd had when they had moved to the farm north of Greene and had electric lights for the first time (1948) and indoor plumbing, hot running water, and even a basement where his mother did the wash and rendered the fat from the hog they butchered every year. Those were the days before government became big government. In a way, 2017 was a little like the 1950's since apparently there was no federal government. Derek noticed the faraway look in his Dad's eyes. "Probably *'Lost in the '50's Tonight* (Ronnie Milsap)," he mused.

The next day was Lorrie's 50th birthday. Man, did that make Sharon feel old. Well, she should, she was 70 herself back on February 12th. Hell, they were all getting old. Gary was 74, Ron 76 and Clarence 79. But, for a bunch of old farts, they seemed to be in reasonably good health, especially considering all of their medical problems. Although the men were exempt from military duty because they were such crusty old curmudgeons, they nevertheless showed up for weekly rifle practice. They couldn't hit much beyond 100-yards, but they said they could keep the bad guys heads down blasting away with their M1A's and FAL's.

Aaron, Bob and Jacob set out to pull another group of doublewides back to The Farm. The squads had returned with the M119A2s on July 3rd and Derek saw to getting them

inspected and squared away. The crops and gardens were doing nicely and new potatoes and peas plus sweet corn and fresh tomatoes adorned nearly every table in the community. The scavengers had gone to Omaha on this trip; they found several unassembled doublewides in Omaha, and Council Bluffs. Between those homes and the ones they'd located in Lincoln, they were planning on pulling back 45 more homes, bringing the community total to 270 homes. The rule of thumb seemed to be that there were about 2.7 residents per home and this meant that the population was due for a surge up to about 730 residents. More of the folks from down New Mexico way were ready to move, just as soon as the home became available.

In fact, several of the families had already moved and their household goods were still on trailers. They were living with friends until their houses became ready. Bob called in on 40-meters to report that rumor had it that the bad guys were in the Des Moines area and headed west. They were pulling out with the 45 homes and planned to drive straight through to get back to The Farm.

Derek hooked up with the People in New Mexico and told them that if anyone was planning to move, come now or hold up for a while until this bunch of bad guys was dealt with. Not surprisingly, the people said they'd finish loading and drive straight through to lend assistance in the fight. The New Mexican commanders offered mutual aid, but Derek said that with the defensive posture they had adopted in Colorado, he didn't think it was necessary for them to come up to help.

o

Most everyone arrived in a 12-hour period, including Aaron, Bob and Jacob with the new homes and the final families from New Mexico. Derek put out forward observers in Ma Deuce equipped Hummers at the I-80, I-76 junction and The Farm went to Yellow Alert. In this posture, the farmer's kept cultivating and farming, but carried their weapons and equipment. The observation tower was now staffed with four people 24/7. All of the vehicles were fueled up and turned over so that they could be moved, if necessary. All of the children were moved to the basement of the Community Center as much to keep them out of the way as to protect them. Everyone in the 15 to 45 age group was suited up and packing, but continued with their normal activities as best they could.

Aaron had Damon along and left him in the North Platte, Nebraska area with his Harley. Damon didn't have a radio, but he could make that Harley move, especially since he'd spend hours working on the motor. The plan was for Damon to head west at full throttle the minute he laid eyes on the bad guys. When he came roaring through picking up I-76, the forward observers would give The Farm the heads up and they, in turn, would notify the Kiowa's to begin air operations.

The Kiowa Warrior's had an operating range of about 300 miles at sea level and a ceiling around 19,000 feet. Stores of fuel and replacement munitions were maintained at The Farm eliminating the necessity of the observation helicopters returning to Denver to

refit and/or refuel. A flight of two of the OH58D's would stop at The Farm to refuel on the way to the I-80, I-76 junction.

It was close to 18 hours after everyone had arrived at The Farm that Damon came blazing through the I-76, I-80 junction. He barely slowed, but risked a wave at the Hummer to let them know it was him. Four of the 8 Kiowa's departed Denver with two refueling at The Farm and continuing. The other two refueled and stood by to relieve the first pair. They planned to fly the choppers near their operational ceilings to avoid detection by the bad guys. The Apaches and remaining Kiowa's would be scrambled when the bad guys got within 75 miles of The Farm or Denver. Damon beat the Hummer back to The Farm by a wide time margin. He went to the bar to get a beer and wash the bugs out of his teeth. When the bad guys turned down I-76, Derek moved their alert status to Orange and the farmer's and others returned to the compound.

When the second flight of Kiowa's reported the bad guys at the 75 mile mark, the Apaches and other Kiowa's flew to the farm and refueled. They immediately departed, hoping to stop them in their tracks at 50 miles away. In this instance, the Apaches were armed with 8 Hellfire's, 38 Hydra 70 Folding Fin Aerial Rockets (2.75"), 4 Sidewinders and the 30mm cannon with 1,200 rounds of ammo. The Kiowa's were armed with a Hydra pod and a Hellfire pod.

o

All they could do at the farm was listen to the radio broadcasts as the 20 helicopters attacked the long convoy of bad guy vehicles. Half of the Apaches took them head on and the other half flew to the junction to bottle up the vehicles there. The Kiowa's flew on to the east to block the tail of the column. While the six Apache's moved down the column the six at the junction would split into two groups of three and work their way toward the other Apache's and Kiowa's. The general idea was to bottle the vehicles up and trap the entire column. If they could accomplish that mission, they could return to The Farm, refuel, rearm and return to make a second pass at the bad guys.

The bad guys might not have been rocket scientists, but they watched TV too back in the days when there was still a TV to watch. Along their journeys, they had picked up a dozen Stinger missiles and figured out how to make them work. These missiles were distributed evenly through the column of about 650 vehicles. Before they had a chance to use the Stingers in the first few vehicles, the vehicles were burning hulks, but further back in the column, some of the men managed to get the Stingers up and locked on to the choppers. Two Apache's and a Kiowa succumbed to Stinger hits. Other than that, the plan worked as planned.

Three of the Apaches stayed behind to provide cover for the downed helicopters with their 30mm guns and all of the others returned to The Farm to refuel and rearm. The second time out, the Hellfire modules were replaced with the 2.75" rocket pods. Two hours later, most of the column lay in ruins. Three of the crewmen aboard the downed

helicopters were dead and three seriously wounded. How any of them would survive was an answer known only to God.

Derek stood the helicopters down and had them RTB in Denver. He dispatched the Hummers to 'clean up' the mess. Radio reports came back a while later that about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the bad guys were dead or dying. Give the folks a couple of hours, they said, and the fatality rate would be 100%. Derek told them to push the vehicles off I-76 and I-80 into the ditches. Maybe the next bunch of bad guys would get the idea and bypass Denver altogether. The doctor reported that all three surviving aircrew members would probably survive but their flying days were over; their injuries were just too severe.

The Rock – Chapter 12 – Picking up the Pieces

The loss of the three aircrews hit Derek hard. The families of the dead and injured were moved from Denver to The Farm and given all the support and compassion the folks could manage. Derek consulted with his opposite number in New Mexico and inquired about additional aircrew members. The people down in New Mexico had 6 extra Apache crews and two extra Kiowa crews. If the folks wanted to move to Colorado, they'd let Derek know. Derek concluded that they needed a fleet of 16 Apaches and 8 Kiowa's with a 25% backup. That translated into 10 more Apaches and 3 more Kiowa's. He loaded all 10 remaining Apache crews and three of the Kiowa crews aboard a business jet parked at Denver airport and sent them to Ft. Hood to bring back the additional helicopters. He also dispatched the 4 5-ton trucks to Ft. Hood with an armed escort to pick up more spare parts.

Derek got a call back from New Mexico four days later. The aviators were all willing to relocate to Colorado. Derek asked where the folks from New Mexico had found additional munitions for the Apaches and Kiowa's and the General down in New Mexico just laughed. They had cleaned the place out to bare walls he said; how many of what did Derek need? The aircrews would bring the extra munitions with them, he said. He also asked where Derek was basing his helicopters.

Derek told him Denver and he suggested that he run the contractor back up to Colorado and get him to put an airfield right there at The Farm. It sounded good to Derek, so they told the General to go for it. Those aircrew members couldn't perhaps bring along a few doublewides, Derek asked. No problem, he was told, there were plenty of doublewides in Gallup.

That poor contractor hadn't been back in New Mexico for more than a week. If they'd just known, he could have stayed in Colorado and put in the airfield and saved some travel. It had been a bear, but he had managed to get the remaining foundations and slabs in and The Farm only needed homes to fill the slabs.

Maybe, he thought, he should just move to Colorado himself. Most of his wife's friends had already moved to Colorado and it sure would cut down on the driving. They talked it over and he sent a substantial portion of his crew to Gallup to get homes for those among them who wanted to move to Colorado. His foreman wanted to stay in New Mexico, so the two of them worked out a deal for the foreman to take over that operation. The men remaining behind also went to Gallup to help their friends pull the second half of their homes. The General saw to it that everyone's household goods were loaded and moved.

o

There were 8 new homes coming up from New Mexico for the aircrews and 15 more for the concrete folks. 270 plus 23 makes 293. Then, Aaron, Bob and Jacob returned from Des Moines and central Iowa with 57 more homes. They ended the summer with 350

homes and 50 of them were empty. Then the aircrews moved in from Denver, occupying the 19 of those 50 homes. A quick count showed the population of The Farm to be 852 on Labor Day, 2017. Aaron, Bob and Jacob were all for taking a short vacation and then heading to California to see what they could do about getting the wind turbines over the winter. The Farm would just have to make do with the 38 empty homes until the following summer.

The continuing population growth presented a problem for The Farm. They couldn't grow their beef herd fast enough to keep up with the population growth. Aaron suggested that he head up to the Coalinga area, and see if there were any cattle there. Along I-5 about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, there was a dry lot back in 2004 that typically held over 100,000 animals.

Gary had mentioned it to Aaron at one time or another and Aaron thought it was worth the fuel to see if there were still any cattle there. They talked it over and since it was less than 3 hours' drive north of Tehachapi, they decided to risk the fuel. The next problem became what they might have that they could exchange for the cattle since they had almost no gold or silver. They decided that there were plenty of military vehicles at Ft. Carson, so they hauled out vehicles and munitions and would try and barter them for the cattle, if there were any.

While Aaron and the others took their vacation, Derek sent people down to Ft. Carson to bring back some Mk-19 and Ma Deuce equipped Hummers. Then they started to hunt around the Denver area for cattle trucks; they found 4. They also found a 1½-ton straight truck that they could haul a bull back in if they found one.

They didn't really have any idea what to expect with respect to the wind turbines. The three old geezers told them there was thousands in Tehachapi, but they had no idea of the size or anything else. Make them all the same brand, it was suggested, for convenience of parts. Derek would send an extra Hummer along with the concrete contractor so he could get an idea about what they needed for bases for the towers. They weren't sure how many it would take to generate 3 megawatts, (60) but get enough so that The Farm could go completely to alternative energy sources for electricity.

Aaron, Bob, Jacob and a large crew left for California during late September. The crews drove the vehicles they planned to use for trade. They sent along a single 16,000-gallon tanker of diesel fuel for the fleet of vehicles. As it turned out, that was the smartest move they'd made in a long time. Out in California, fuel of any kind had become the new medium of exchange, but they didn't know that. They did, however take that second Ham radio along, their second best move.

o

They arrived in Tehachapi about 4 days after they left. Several of the towers were down, but after reading the equipment manuals, Aaron decided to go with the AOC-15/50 turbines. There were 75 of the turbines of that model at Tehachapi, giving them the 60

they needed and a 25% reserve for parts. Before they started dismantling the towers, they wanted to see about that beef.

The next morning they left for the Coalinga area, taking all of their vehicles with them except for the transports for the turbines. When they arrived at the interchange on I-5, there were hundreds, perhaps thousands of cattle on the dry lot. They started asking around and found that a company named Harris owned the lot. They were getting some weird looks from these Californians, especially their military vehicles, but Bob noticed that most of the stares were directed at the fuel tanker.

They followed the directions they were given and eventually came to what appeared to be the headquarters for the cattle company. It got very interesting very quickly. No sooner had they pulled to a stop than they found dozens of rifles pointed in their direction. Aaron got down, made a bit of a production of taking off his sidearm and headed to what appeared to be the office. As he walked up, he noticed the mini-blind part briefly and snap shut. "Well, they know I'm here and unarmed," Aaron thought, "I wonder how this is going to all work out."

Aaron knocked on the door. A voice from within said "Come in." He entered to find a half dozen or so well armed men sitting around the room.

"Can I help you?" a voice asked.

"My name is Aaron Little," he said, "We're here from Colorado looking to barter for some cattle."

"From the looks of that Army you brought," the man said, "I wager you're planning on taking them. Am I right?"

If you're referring to the Hummers with the Ma Deuces and Mk-19's," Aaron said, "That's what we brought to trade."

"They might be worth something to us," the man said. "My name is John Harris and I'm the foreman here. We'd be interested in the Hummer's, but I can tell you right now that the fuel in that tanker of yours is worth one hell of a lot more to us. Would you be willing to part with some or all of it?"

"It's diesel fuel John," Aaron said, "And I think we could work something out, what do you have in mind?"

"I can let you have a steer for 500 gallons and a heifer for 750," John answered. "That looks to be a 16,000-gallon tanker, so you can figure out what you want to trade for."

"How many gallons to fill my four trucks with heifers and put a bull on the 1½-ton truck?" Aaron asked.

“You have that much fuel available?” John asked.

“That would depend on how much fuel ‘that much fuel’ is,” Aaron answered.

“Figure 160 head of heifers plus a bull,” John said, “I’d make that 150,000-gallons.”

“Figure 160 heifers, 10 steers and a bull,” Aaron answered, “And I’ll get 10 transports of 16,000-gallons each on the road within an hour.”

“You’re serious!” John responded.

“As a heart attack John,” Aaron replied.

“Hell for 160,000-gallons of stabilized diesel, I’ll go 15 not 10 steers,” John said.

“You’ve got yourself a deal,” Aaron said. “Don’t suppose I could hire some labor to help us remove some of those wind turbines down in Tehachapi could I?”

“Maybe,” John said, “How much fuel is that worth to you?”

“Make me an offer,” Aaron said.

“Well sir, I expect we could get a couple of hundred people to help for another two transports of fuel,” John said.

“You’ve got yourself a deal John,” Aaron replied, “Let’s go make the radio call now.”

“Boys break out some beers for our guests,” John said, “It looks like we’ve cornered the market on diesel fuel.”

It’s funny how things worked out. Aaron conservatively estimated that they had upwards of 10 million gallons of diesel fuel between Cheyenne, Lincoln, Omaha and Des Moines. And, there was still diesel fuel in Denver and Albuquerque. They had some in the one bunker in the cavern.

The Hummer’s on the other hand were getting to be in short supply in Colorado. They set up the antenna and called back to The Farm. They needed 12 tankers of diesel fuel ASAP to trade for all the cattle they could use. Derek said he would have the tankers on the road in an hour. How many of the Hummer’s had Aaron had to give up? None, Aaron advised, but the diesel fuel was practically worth its weight in gold. And, by the way, they were bringing back 75 wind turbines and needed bases for 60. Hang on a minute and he’d get Bill to give them the dimension of the foundations.

o

Before he got off the radio, Aaron suggested that Derek send the convoy of tankers across on I-80 to Sacramento and down I-5 to the junction with state route 145. He also recommended that Derek send all the protection for the convoy he could spare, that fuel was liquid gold. Bill got on the radio and started to give specific dimensions for the tower foundations. Although Aaron rarely drank, he thought maybe the moment justified a beer, maybe two.

They actually ended up spending several nights until the transports arrived with the diesel fuel. Derek had not only sent along every Hummer he had, he had sent an extra tanker of diesel fuel for the Hummer's and a tanker of JP8 for the 4 Apaches he had flying air cover. That sparked another round of negotiations. John figured he could come up with a tractor and trailer and another 40 steers for the extra 16,000-gallons of diesel. Aaron checked with the tanker driver, and found that the tanker only held 12,000 gallons of fuel, the Hummer's ate diesel like crazy. When he told John, John said he'd trust him for the other 4,000-gallons. Hell, he would give them 40 heifers instead of steers if they would bring in one more tanker of fuel. Aaron readily agreed, but said that they had to transport the beef, Apaches and Hummer's back to Colorado before they could send another tanker. Close enough John said. The next day, the Apaches, the five semis, the 1½-ton truck and most of the Hummers set off to Colorado with their precious cargo of beef.

A radio call to Derek arranged for the extra tanker of diesel fuel to depart as soon as the beef and Hummers arrived in Colorado. Meanwhile, there were 75 wind turbines just waiting to be disassembled in Tehachapi. They later learned that there are a couple of wind farms in Colorado.

One was east of Colorado Springs about 50 miles and the other one was on the west slope north of I-70 somewhere. That was ok, better to keep them in Colorado and bring in additional equipment from California. In the meantime, they were in the beef business big time. With two hundred pairs of hands, more or less, to help, the wind turbines were down and aboard the trailers by the time the last transport of diesel arrived at the ranch.

Fortunately for them, the Californians had had ample storage for the diesel fuel and the empty tankers were able to return to Colorado with the beef convoy. The final fuel transport returned with them to Colorado with their treasure of turbines.

The elapsed time? They were back in Colorado with the turbines in time for Thanksgiving; and what a Thanksgiving it would be. Those 200 heifers and the bull made them cattle barons of a sort. By next summer, they would have beef to export to New Mexico and in a few short years, the country. They had a total of 227 cows and two bulls. In four short years, their herd should run about 1,150 cows. That translated into a lot of beef to export and tons of cheese. Maybe John out in California would know where they could find a cheese maker. (Yeah... Wisconsin.)

o

Fortunately Bill's men used a trencher to run power lines at the same time they put in the 60 foundations for the wind turbines. There were lots of willing hands at The Farm and everything was wired, waiting for the installation of the control panels and turbines.

Aaron had brought back a complete control system from Tehachapi and it, too, could be controlled from any computer in the tract, if you knew the password. The shopping list for the coming year would include cheese making equipment, a cheese maker, more doublewides and more computers. However, if they were going to expand beyond the 500 homes in the tract, they would have to come up with more of those PV panels and deep cycle batteries. They had done very well on the batteries in Des Moines and had enough to equip the last 150 homes (9,000 batteries from a manufacturer's warehouse.) Future homes might have to rely solely on the wind turbines and generators for their electricity unless they got very, very lucky.

They spent the four weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas installing the control panel for the wind turbines and working when the weather permitted had the last of the turbines up and operating by the first of April. As it was, someone calculated and realized that five hundred homes would need 3.75 megawatts of power. That put them behind the power curve in terms of replacing the homes' electricity with wind-generated electricity and/or their generators.

The spare 15 turbines could be installed to bring them up to 3.75 megawatts of wind-generated electricity, but they would have to add a couple of more generators. They presumed that it was better to have too much electricity than not enough. This, after all, was not the 1950's; it was 2018.

Here they were on the first of April 2018 and they needed 150 doublewides, spare parts for the wind turbines, cheese making equipment, a cheese maker, 2 more generators and God knew what else. Aaron got an idea and ran it by the decision makers.

Fleetwood homes used to have a manufacturing plant in Hemet, California, what did they think of the idea of going to Hemet and looking for homes? Bill suggested that they could probably get John to check it out for them for a lot less fuel than they would spend on a hunch. Plus, he reminded them California was the ideal place to look for a cheese maker. John allowed himself to be persuaded to check on the mobile homes for 500-gallons of diesel. He'd throw in finding them a cheese maker.

John called back 5 days later to report that there were 75 new homes in Hemet and that he had a line on the cheese maker. That large a number of homes called for an assist from the folks in New Mexico. They were available to help, but asked for some beef and pork in compensation for their time and fuel. Fair deal and besides, The Farm had so many hogs they needed to find a couple of more steel buildings to use as hog houses. They agreed to meet in Hemet on April 15th to get the homes. Aaron called John and asked him to meet him in Tehachapi to pick up his diesel fuel.

o

The convoy from The Farm left the next day, they had much more to do than haul back homes. They wanted more of the PV panels, batteries, and whatever else they could get in the greater Los Angeles area.

Exide Technologies had several branches and a manufacturing facility in the greater Los Angeles area. Maybe this was their best shot at getting batteries. Perhaps the business-to-business Yellow Pages for Los Angeles could direct them to a source for more of the PV panels.

Then, there were the steel buildings and the spare parts for the wind turbines. Aaron and a few men headed for Tehachapi while others looked for the shingles, batteries and other things. John had the foresight to bring five extra men with him and the 12 men had all the spare parts available loaded up in a matter of hours. Aaron gave him the 1,000-gallon military trailer of diesel fuel and told him to keep the trailer.

John had located 3 people who were familiar with cheese making and willing to locate in Colorado. Rather than choose, Aaron told John that all three were welcome in Colorado; they planned on having a large cheese making operation. The scroungers did very well on the PV panels, and located a warehouse with enough for another 500 homes plus 4 new community buildings.

Unfortunately, they didn't do so well on batteries. They had found 5 semi-trailers loaded with batteries waiting to be delivered, but only two of the trailers held deep cycle batteries. They'd brought all five trailers; the automotive batteries gave them something to trade, but they were way short on deep cycle batteries. They did, however, have a list of Exide's US plants and locations.

They all assembled in Hemet on the 15th of April. Aaron had 5 trailers of batteries, one trailer of spare parts and controllers for the wind turbines and 19 trailers of PV panels. He had run out of tractors, trailers and drivers for more. They hooked up to the 75 mobile homes and the entire entourage headed for Colorado.

The folks from New Mexico agreed to take one trailer load of the automotive batteries in exchange for part of the meat they were promised. Everything seemed to be working out well. In their absence, the 15 remaining wind turbines had been erected and were waiting connection and the equipment aboard the truck. The crops were all in and the gardens were being planted.

They unloaded the three trailers of automotive batteries so they could provide an assortment to the folks from New Mexico. It was only then that they discovered that two of the trailers held a new Exide product, a deep-cycle automotive battery. That made it a whole lot easier and they reloaded the regular automotive batteries back on the one trailer, gave the folks from New Mexico 30 steers and sent them on their way. (Exide submarine batteries are manufactured in Germany.) The best estimate was that they had taken just over half of the PV panels from the LA warehouse, so they dispatched 20

semis and a military guard unit back to LA to clean out the warehouse. Aaron suggested that they try eastern Iowa for more doublewides. Exide had a plant in eastern Iowa somewhere in a town named Manchester. Gary told them it was on US 20 somewhere east of Waterloo, but he didn't know exactly where.

o

Aaron figured on a trip to Iowa and a trip to Kansas. Exide had another plant in Salina, Kansas. As it was, they could really only haul 45 homes in a single trip, due to limitations on the number of transports. Several of them were down for maintenance of one sort or another. While there probably were enough new empty doublewides sitting around the US to meet their needs, they were getting harder and harder to find. More recently, they had been towing in as many near-new homes from Iowa and Nebraska as new homes. It was all the same to them, but it meant more work.

On the other hand, it alleviated the need to search for furniture, so perhaps it was a tradeoff. The Manchester, Iowa facility turned out to be a plastic manufacturing operation, but the Salina, Kansas operation looked good on paper. They had both a battery manufacturing plant and a distribution center. They did manage to locate 45 new and near-new doublewides by going all of the way to the Quad Cities.

The trucks had returned from California with the remaining contents of the warehouse. It appeared as if they had more than enough PV panels for a complete second tract. By joining the two tracts, the concrete contractor could eliminate one wall. After a brief delay, he set about pouring the new wall while others began trenching for additional utilities. Of course, this meant a second septic field was required so one group headed to Denver to find the components they needed. The wall went up faster than any of the other projects. But, it meant working around the clock to maintain the continuous pour.

Maybe the folks were getting the cart in front of the horse, but there were so many infrastructures to put in place before they could begin erecting homes. Properly done, the slabs would be poured, the utilities and streets in and the community buildings erected and equipped before the first home went into the second tract. At least, that was the way they saw it.

They still didn't have the hog houses, but they had found the warehouse in LA where they could get all of the steel building components they could haul. To minimize fuel expended on security, they decided to take 40 trucks to LA and empty out that warehouse in one fell swoop. Besides, LA purely made all of them very nervous. It was as if they were being watched all of the time.

Derek figured his air force was more than adequate. However, with a larger area to guard, he wanted another 16 tanks and more Bradley's. Plus, there wasn't a Hummer of any description to be found in the Denver area. So, off they went to Fort Bliss with 16 of the M1000's to pick up 16 of the M1A3 tanks and all the Ma Deuce, Mk-19 and TOW equipped Hummers he could find. They needed one hell of a lot of those Bouncing Bet-

ties, too. Anyway, rather than make another trip back to Ft. Hood, they cleaned out all of the mines of every description.

They had to precede the people working in the second tract area and locate and disarm the M-16APM's. It had been one of the most chilling experiences of Derek's life. He hadn't actually disarmed the mines himself, but he must have held his breath the entire time.

About all that grass; the good side was that the enemy couldn't see the mines but the bad side was that his people had a pretty tough time themselves and they had a map of the mines. But, they'd managed somehow and after the concrete contractor had completed the wall, they'd re-laid the minefields exactly as before. The Claymores had been one hell of a lot easier to move, it merely meant extending the electrical wires. He prayed to God they never had to move those M-16APM's again.

Down at Ft. Bliss, they loaded M1A3 Abrams tanks on the M1000's. Then they headed to the bunkers looking for more of the mines. After the experience of moving the minefields the things made Derek nervous even in their containers, but they were a surefire cure for what ailed an enemy. Had he to do it over, Derek would have set the mines up for command detonation, but he wasn't about to change in midstream. They did pretty well on locating the Hummer's he wanted and they headed back to The Farm.

The Exide Distribution center proved to be a gold mine for Aaron. He had no idea if the batteries were manufactured right there in Salinas or somewhere else, but he got what he was looking for. He also got the last 30 homes they needed to finish the first tract and 15 to start the new tract. It was still early in the fall, but that was enough for one year. They had more homes than people to occupy them. Besides, it had occurred to him that they should be worrying about a wall around the airfield rather than a wall around the new tract. He had an idea he wanted to run by Derek to see if it flew.

o

The airfield lay directly across the road from the first tract. Aaron reasoned that in the interim, they could park the helicopters in the second tract, but for the long haul, he wanted to take out the road and replace it with a concrete tunnel connecting the airfield and the first compound. At least the contractor had the good sense to set the airfield a ¼ mile back from the road; that would allow them to ring the airfield with a minefield or fields to protect the choppers. They probably had enough tanks; Derek had said he was picking up 16 more, so maybe some Mk-19's and Ma Deuces plus a few Bradley's with their 25mm cannons would be sufficient. They really only needed to defend the airfield long enough for the choppers to depart. After that, what was there to protect beyond the spare parts and munitions?

Derek and his people got back to The Farm ahead of Aaron's group. He got his people busy installing the mine fields to the east and west and placed the Abrams and Hummer's. They made a trip back to Ft. Carson, and when they realized that they were only

leaving behind 24 Bradley's decided to take the entire complement of vehicles. He wasn't sure what to do with the extra 24, but better he should have them than the opposition, whoever that might be. Having no better place to park the Bradley's, he parked them between the airfield and the road.

Aaron and his people pulled in the following day and within minutes Aaron was sitting in front of Derek.

"When did you start to read minds?" Aaron asked.

"Huh?" was the best that Derek could manage.

"Derek, I, was going to make several recommendations to you, but it looks like you're way ahead of me," Aaron replied.

"Aaron, make the recommendations, I have no idea what you're talking about," Derek laughed.

"I was going to recommend that we wall in the airfield Derek and surround it with Bradley's," Aaron began. "I was also going to recommend that you put in the minefield or fields like you have around the two tracts. We could take out the road and replace it with a concrete tunnel, connecting the two facilities. Then, if we got hit by a surprise attack, the pilots would be able to get to the choppers without getting their butts shot off."

"We're short some equipment if you want to do that Aaron," Derek said. "I probably have enough mines because we cleaned out Ft. Bliss. But, we'll need some more Ma Deuces and some Mk-19's."

I was thinking the same thing," Aaron said, "Are you sure you don't read minds? Anyway, can you get those from Ft. Carson?"

"I'm not sure, we've pretty much picked the place clean," Derek replied. "But we might have missed something, so I'll send someone down tomorrow to look. I'll tell you one thing; there probably isn't a vehicle or a round of ammo to be found down there. But, who knows, maybe there is a bunker full of infantry equipment."

The long and short of it was that there wasn't a bunker full of infantry equipment, but does a ½ full bunker count? There were 20 Ma Deuces but only 4 Mk-19's. It wasn't worth another trip all the way back to Ft. Hood or Ft. Bliss just to get a few more Mk-19's. With a sustained rate of fire of 40rpm, they could sweep each side of the airfield pretty good. The Mk-19's at the main compound would also help. With an effective range of 1,400-meters, they could reach the half-mile to the airfield without difficulty. The contractor stopped pouring slabs and got busy on the smaller fence around the airfield. The tunnel would have to wait until spring.

o

Speaking of the tunnel, Derek was all in favor of putting one in but was concerned about the tunnel serving as the road. He discussed the problem with his Dad. The tanks went around 70 tons and it would take a pretty heavy duty tunnel to be able to support that kind of weight, Derek advised Gary.

“No biggie kid, the runway at Van Nuys airport goes right over a street, Sherman Way, maybe, I can’t remember,” Gary said. “The airport in Dallas has a tunnel under the runway, if I remember right. Can’t be sure, it’s been about 25 years since I was in that airport. The thing you have to remember is that the sphere is the strongest shape there is. The next best thing to a sphere is a cylinder. So, to make a tunnel to support a lot of weight, you have to make a half cylinder or put a cylinder on top of uprights. If it were up to me, I’d go for a pure half cylinder. Pack the dirt in around it real tight like and it will be strong as hell. Pour a slab over the top and you have yourself a pretty good road.”

“I’ll have to talk to Bill about pouring a cylinder, I guess,” Derek replied.

“That man can pour anything Derek,” Gary said. “Tell him what you need now and he’ll probably have a slip form fabricated before spring.”

The Rock – Chapter 13 – Unexpected Challenges

Derek took Gary's advice and had a talk with Bill about the tunnel.

"They only problem I see, Derek, is that we'd have to put rebar in that tunnel and it was hard enough putting rebar in the walls with a continuous pour," Bill explained. "You're talking about something entirely different with a tunnel. But, let me work on it and I'll figure something out."

"Get back to me when you can, Bill," Derek said and headed back to his office. When he got there, Aaron was waiting to talk to him.

"What's up Aaron?" Derek asked.

"We need more bulls," Aaron said, "We have 227 cows, but only two bulls. We should have 20 bulls, not two."

"Did you contact John out in California?" Derek inquired.

"Yes, but he wants 30,000-gallons of diesel fuel per bull," Aaron said.

"Isn't that what you gave for the bull you got from him?" Derek said.

"Yeah, but we're talking 600,000-gallons of diesel fuel. I can't see giving the guy 7-8% of our available fuel for only 20 bulls," Aaron objected.

"Offer him a tanker a bull Aaron and tell him that is all the diesel we can spare," Derek suggested.

"I sort of let it slip that we had about 10-million gallons of diesel available," Aaron said, so he has us over a barrel."

"I don't care if he knows how much fuel we have Aaron," Derek replied calmly, "Tell him the decision is out of your hands. He can run his vehicles on cow dung for all I care."

"I'll work something out with him. By the way, the people tell me that on that last trip to LA they had the feeling they were being watched the entire time," Aaron changed the subject.

"Was it anything specific, or just a feeling?" Derek perked up.

"Just a feeling, but they were pretty spooked, I can tell you that," Aaron allowed.

"It sounds like we need to get that tunnel in the minute the ground thaws," Derek concluded. "As for the bulls, just make the best deal you can. We haven't hit the fuel sup-

plies in Minneapolis or several other large cities, so we should be okay on diesel. The word is that Texas is producing new diesel fuel at a pretty good clip anyway.”

Derek had a lot to think about. There was the tunnel and the bulls, but the possible security threat really got his attention. They had joked at one time that he was the Commander-in-Chief of the entire military, but that simply wasn't true. The New Mexican Army was bigger than his and they had a militia to back them up that probably ran to almost 30,000.

Maybe he should make a trip back to New Mexico and consolidate the two Armies into a single Division. And, maybe he should make another trip back to Ft. Hood and improve his air forces. He might be able to pick up some more Mk-19's while he was at it.

o

Bill was back to Derek in a week. He proposed to put in a tunnel with an 8' diameter and 18" thick walls. He'd figured out how to do a continuous pour of a horizontal tunnel and all he needed was warm weather so he could begin. He claimed that the tunnel would support 100-tons with no problem, maybe more. The issue then became how long it would take Bill to construct the tunnel. Bill said he could pour from both ends and meet in the middle. His best estimate was 45 days; start to finish, if he didn't run into trouble.

Aaron was back too. The best he could manage was 24,000-gallons per bull. That would take half of their tankers plus another with fuel for the tankers themselves. The extra tanker could pull ½ diesel in the truck and ½ JP8 in the trailer for the Apaches. Derek said he thought maybe he'd send the Kiowa Warriors instead of the Apaches. If Aaron's people were nervous in LA, they'd better keep the Apaches close to home.

Derek told Aaron to get everything lined up and go immediately, California wasn't all that bad in the winter. He also suggested that they take I-70 to I-15 and go south to Barstow. They could pick up state route 58 there and take it to Bakersfield and then pick up I-5 to the Coalinga area. Donner Pass was a bear in the winter, even when they had snowplows.

Now, if the weather permitted them to start on the tunnel by the first of April, they'd have the tunnel in and sealed up around May 15th. Derek figured that if they were going to go to New Mexico and Texas, he'd better do it now while there was snow on the ground.

He assigned 6 of the Kiowa's to Aaron's party and decided that they would just truck the aircraft from Ft. Hood to Colorado. He didn't want to leave The Farm without defenses, even in the winter. He was also thinking that if he got 32 more M1A2SEPs, he could free up his M1A3s and use the A2s for stationary defense. The turbine engines wouldn't be an issue in that instance.

o

Derek's plate was pretty full as he set out in early February for New Mexico with all 40 M1000's and 40 flatbed semi tractor-trailers. The General in charge of the New Mexican Army was a retired Gunnery Sergeant. Gunny had no illusions about his rank; in fact, he felt downright uncomfortable wearing the star, but he was the most qualified of the soldiers in New Mexico and hadn't really been given a choice. He had rebuilt his forces after the folks went to Colorado and had two full Regiments. The only thing he was short of was a few tanks.

"Hey Gunny," Derek said, "How are you folks doing?"

"It's been pretty quiet Derek and to tell you the truth, that sort of bothers me," Gunny replied. "What brings you down this way?"

"Two things, Gunny," Derek got right to the point. "First, I was thinking maybe we should consolidate our Regiments into a Division. Secondly, I needed to go to Ft. Hood and Ft. Bliss and pick up some more Abrams and choppers."

"Look, I could use 8 more Abrams myself, how about I tag along with you and bring them back here?" Gunny asked.

"We have all 40 of the M1000's, so we can bring back 8 for you," Derek said. "The thing is, I'm not sure where to get munitions for 32 more Abrams."

"Hell, kid, I've got enough munitions to fight WW III and half of WW IV," Gunny laughed. "Bring me the tanks and I'll fill those 8 empty M1000's with munitions."

"What about Hellfire's and rocket pods for the Apaches and Kiowa's?" Derek asked.

"Same story," Gunny said, "But you're going to have to pay for those."

"Pay?" Derek exclaimed. "How? We don't have anything to pay with and it will be at least a year before we have beef to export."

"Actually, I was thinking more in terms of this Division thing," Gunny said. "I'm all for the idea, but I'll be danged if I want to be a Division commander. Besides. President Bush himself made you a light bird, so you're the closest thing we have to a real officer around here."

"Gunny, the former President made me a Lt. Col. by Executive Order. I was a deserter Sgt. before that," Derek protested.

"As far as the deserter part goes, kid, I'd have done the same thing myself in the circumstances," Gunny said seriously. "But, by God, you have what it takes to run a Division, whether you know it or not. So, if you want those munitions, you're the new Division commander."

“Any recommendations on who I make the new Regimental commander?” Derek asked.

“I’ve got just the woman for you,” Gunny said. “Have any problem with a woman being in charge of your Regiment?”

“Not if she’s good,” Derek replied.

“Retired Gunnery Sergeant,” Gunny said, “And she’s hell on wheels.”

“How are you doing on fuel?” Derek asked.

“We could use some,” Gunny admitted.

“Swap you all you can haul for a couple of trailers of PRI-D,” Derek said.

“You have yourself a deal,” Gunny said. “Where do you plan to put the Division HQ?”

“Probably at that airfield we put in,” Derek said.

o

They made their trip to Ft. Hood and loaded 32 more Apaches and 8 Kiowa Warrior’s. At Ft. Bliss, they got 32 M1A3s and 8 M1A2SEPs. When they got back to Artesia, they unloaded the 8 M1A2SEPs and the Gunny’s folks filled the M1000’s with munitions. He followed them back to Colorado, with two trailers of 55 gallon drums of PRI-D and all sixty tankers. When they arrived at The Farm, Gunny was completely amazed at what they had accomplished in so short of a time. Aaron was back with the 20 bulls and another semi load of spare parts for their wind turbines. California was getting very strange, he said.

“Gunny, I’ve got 40 more choppers, but no air crews,” Derek said, “Can you help me out here?”

“There are 32 crews on the way Derek, they’re just waiting to get homes to tow up here,” Gunny said.

“You sure you don’t want to be Division commander?” Derek asked, “You’re way ahead of me.”

“Kid, NCO’s are always about 3 steps ahead of their officers,” Gunny laughed. “Here, I brought you a set of Major General Stars. Now show me where you’re going to put this tunnel you mentioned.”

Derek took Gunny to his office and showed him on a map where the tunnel was going

in. The map was marked up with all of the defensive layers they had built around the compounds and airfield.

Gunny said that as soon as Derek got the extra Ma Deuces and Mk-19's installed, the compounds should be nearly impenetrable. Derek shared their earlier conflict with the bad guys up on I-76 and what it had cost them. Gunny reminded Derek that people died in wars and no one was bulletproof. Three choppers to stop upwards of 3,000 bad guys was a pretty cheap trade off. Yeah to everyone but the families of those dead and disabled aircrews maybe, but Gunny hadn't had to tell the wives.

o

Bill was actually able to start on the tunnel in late March. It was a precarious proposition at best with all of those Bouncing Betty's sown around the area. But, they were very careful and although the tunnel took a week longer than he'd planned, it was in and covered over by May 15th. He went to the second tract and began to pour the slabs for the three community buildings without basements. They went in quickly and he then turned to pouring the remaining foundations and slabs for the homes.

The 32 aircrews raised the population of The Farm to 1,023. There had been several babies born and a few additional families had moved in. Although they still had a few empty homes in the first tract, the second tract was beginning to be occupied. Age had taken a few people, but the three old geezers seemed to have a 99-year lease on life.

Aaron and his people were off looking for more doublewides, the farmers were planting and the women were getting ready to put in the gardens. What kind of year would 2019 prove to be? The weather was finally back to normal, the Ice Age seeming to have passed as quickly as it had come on. Things were looking pretty good, as a matter of fact.

The last week of June, a contingent pulled in from New Mexico. They had 6 Patriot Missile batteries from Ft. Bliss and trained crews to operate the batteries. In this case, each battery consisted of six launchers with each launcher holding 4 missiles. Each battery had its own radar and was a standalone unit.

Even better, they had brought their own doublewide mobile homes. Surface to Air missiles? Derek figured Gunny had gone off the deep end, but what the hell, he put 2 of the batteries at the airfield and one at each corner of the two tracts.

John had come through with those 3 cheese makers, too and they were busy assembling a cheese operation in one of the community buildings in the second tract. Nobody had any idea what they were doing and aside from providing labor to assist them, they were left to their own devices.

One thing was certain, with about 230 cows, there were going to have to erect a massive milking facility and find milking equipment. Once the planting was done, a group of

farmers was sent out with a military escort to find milking equipment. It was also evident that their electrical needs had changed dramatically with the addition of the second tract.

They had cleaned Tehachapi out of the AOC-15/50 units, so they'd have to turn to Palm Springs to get the next 75. As far as the modular generator units went, there were no more of the 600kw generators, but there were plenty of the 500kw diesel powered units. A second set of 8 generators was added in the basement of the second tract's Community Center to back up that tract. A 250kw unit had been added to the first tract bringing its capacity to 4mw.

o

The Farm had grown in population to the point that 9 sections of land were no longer enough to keep all of the residents busy. So, they expanded to the east and the south, adding 7 additional sections of ground. The Farm was now 16 sections, in a square, with the compounds in the northwest corner of the northwest section and the farm buildings in the northeast corner of the same section. The wind farm was south of the two compounds along the western edge of the remainder of the same section. A second section, the one to the east of the farm buildings was used for grazing. That left them 14 sections of ground to cultivate. So far, the garden area was limited to the southeastern corner of the northwest section.

Bill had interrupted pouring home slabs one more time to put in a slab for the new barn and hog houses. It looked like they would try to milk about 75 cows at a time in three shifts. They would need a large stainless steel tank to hold the milk until it could be transferred by a milk transport to the stainless steel tank at the cheese building. The farmers came back with 100 milking machines. Fortunately Bill had started on the hog houses first, so he just expanded the size of the barn to accommodate 100 milking stalls.

Everything was on a roll in June of 2019. As soon as the slabs were in for the hog houses, they began to erect the steel buildings. By the time the slab was in for the barn, they were working on the second hog house. Whoever had come up with the idea for steel buildings had been their savior.

With the slabs all in, Bill tried one more time to finish the foundations and slabs for the 500 homes in tract two. Aaron and his bunch had not only repaired the haulers, but had added additional vehicles along the way. They now could pull in 75 homes at once. The problem was finding the homes. They still preferred new homes over used and had ventured as far as Wisconsin in search of more units. They hit another gold mine in Wisconsin and Minnesota. It would take them 3 trips just to haul back the new homes and there were a whole lot of near-new homes sitting empty. Apparently, people were tending to stay in the southern climes, or was it just the loss of 260 million people that accounted for all of the empty homes? It didn't matter; they would have the second tract half filled by the end of the year.

o

People kept applying for membership to the community. Anyone with a skill to offer who could understand and could accept that the community was democratic but not a democracy was admitted.

The problem with a pure democracy is that no one is in charge. The old saying best described the problem with pure democracies. "In all the towns and all the cities, there are no statues to committees." The Farm was essentially governed by the people in Aaron, Bob and Jacob's age group and the military under Derek and his Regimental commanders. The three old geezers were an advisory panel, probably because they were so old that they could usually remember what life was like in simpler times.

The governing council, if that is the proper name, was made up from one representative from each of the disciplines at The Farm. Logistics, Utilities, Farming, Security, Military (2 representatives) and Salvaging made up the primary group. Aaron acted as the head of the council, however, when it came right down to life or death decisions affecting their security, the military representatives had the final say.

With TV having become a thing of a nearly forgotten time, people had found new forms of entertainment and the population had slowly crept from an average household of 2.7 persons to 3 and then to 3.3. The council expected that the trend would probably continue. Had not so many of the population been past the child bearing years, the average would probably have already reached 4 persons per household.

One might think that in a community of over 1,000 persons there would be a little hanky panky going on. Let's face it, people will be people. Not at The Farm. Fooling around was the easiest way there was to garner an invitation to leave.

And, the invitation wasn't limited to the guilty. It was extended to the entire family of both of the accused people. That had occurred one time and one time only, during the second year. Both families were sent packing by the council with not much more than the clothes on their backs. That ended the fooling around that year and the word soon spread. That's not to say that no one was fooling around, but if they were, they gave a whole new meaning to the term discreet.

When there was a single community building, church services were held on Sunday mornings. They had finally managed to find a non-denominational preacher who wasn't particularly fundamentalist. He borrowed a little from the doctrines of a half dozen or more denominations and everyone was reasonably comfortable with what they had. With the construction of the community buildings in the second tract, some discussion had been raised about having a dedicated church building. However, when the council booted that one up to the three old geezers for consideration, their reply was immediate. A church is the people, not a building. Besides, the three old men didn't see any sense in letting a building stand idle for most of the time.

o

Gunny called up to advise Derek that they'd had a little trouble. He had no idea why, but a bunch from California, or so it seemed, had attacked them. The attackers quickly withdrew in the face of the immediate and volatile reaction of the New Mexicans, but Gunny just wanted Derek to have a heads up.

General Barbara Childs was Derek's new Regimental commander. When she got word of the problem, she immediately dispatched 4 Apaches to cover Aaron and the group up in Minnesota. Over the intervening time, Aaron had spotted various airports with supplies of JP8 (Jet A) and the Apaches zigzagged their way to Minnesota. They located 4 lowboys and tractors in Minneapolis and loaded a tanker with JP8 to accompany them back to The Farm. From now on, a flight of 4 Apaches and 1 Kiowa Warrior would be trucked everywhere the scavengers went beyond a 100-mile radius of The Farm. Between the 5 choppers and the 8 Hummer's the convoys would be fairly well protected.

They found that the diesel generators in the second tract were being run more often than they wanted. As soon as Aaron had those homes back from Minnesota, they had to consider making that trip to Palm Springs. That drew a lot of discussion among the council members. The majority opinion, and that opinion was supported by Derek and Barbara, was that it was simply too risky to go to California during the summer.

However, they could get the foundations in for the turbines and put the wiring in. Bill was almost done with the foundations and slabs and he refused to stop until they were done. He insisted he had plenty of time to get them in before they were needed. So, they got busy running the wiring from the staked out foundations to the basement of the community center.

Bill had a good point. Every time they interrupted him with another of their higher priority projects, he lost efficiency. Besides, not only did he intend to put in foundations for 75 new wind turbines, he intended to get that slip wall unit up and running and wall in the turbines. After that, he intended to do the same for the farm buildings. Hell, he might even run a tunnel from the first tract to the farm buildings when he had time. But first, he intended to finish those 500 foundations and slabs.

The scavengers had been busy in the Denver area collecting more farm machinery. The increase to 16 sections put a heavy strain on the amount of equipment they had and they simply needed more equipment. They wanted to erect a steel building to use as a machine shed, but when they approached Bill about pouring a slab, they quickly decided that an insulated pole building would do just fine.

Then they got to talking it over and decided that it didn't take a PhD to pour a concrete slab, so they poured their own. Bill sent his foreman over to advise, apparently feeling a little guilty about the whole affair. He also sent his crew to start putting in the forms for the turbine foundations as soon as they had the last of the slabs framed up.

o

Bill brought up the matter of the walls to Derek and they decided that it was far more important to protect the livestock than the wind turbines. The homes mostly generated their own electricity and there were the backup generators. Conversely, they didn't really have any backups when it came to the livestock. Bill left the people putting in the forms and pouring the foundations for the turbines and got his other crew pouring the wall around the farm buildings.

The machine shed was almost as big as a warehouse and since they had taken the time to pour a floor, the men had gone ahead and erected a steel building. That used up the last of the steel building components from LA, too.

Derek figured that the new wall needed protecting and they inventoried their weapons. They could spare 6 Mk-19's, 6 Ma Deuces and 4 replacement mini-guns that went with the Kiowa's. It made more sense to him and Barbara to replace 4 of the Ma Deuces over the gates to the compounds with the mini-guns so they ended up with 6 grenade launchers and 10 .50 caliber machine guns protecting the farm buildings. That raised a whole new question for them. How would the livestock react to all of that gunfire? No so well they concluded and sent the scavengers out looking for railroad ties and 4x6s to build much stronger fences in the barn area.

Bill was getting pretty efficient at erecting the slip form walls. When he had put the tunnel in between the airfield and the main compound, he had changed the concrete mix ever so slightly and when used in a vertical wall, he could slip the forms about 1.5 times faster.

And, they really only needed a single gate for the enclosure, so the wall went up quickly. The military had won out on the decision concerning when to go to Palm Springs, so Aaron made the third trip to Minnesota and Wisconsin to get the last 75 new homes.

Everything was pretty much in balance, construction wise, on Labor Day. The foundations for the 75 wind turbines were done, the 500 foundations and slabs were done, the wall around the farm buildings was done and waiting for a gate and the trench for the tunnel between the main compound and the farm buildings reached halfway to the main compound.

The tunnel itself was a simple rectangle because it didn't need to support 100-tons. The gardening operation was proving to be outstanding with the addition of all that manure from the cattle.

The building that some had wanted to turn into a church had been turned into a cannery of sorts. It was almost going to be a year-round operation; all of the canning was done in pint and quart jars, they had thousands now, and during the 'off season' they were canning stews and meat dishes.

The bakery building not only housed the bakery, but the mill where they ground the wheat and a small area where they produced pastas. The third community building in tract 2 held the cheese operation. In the original tract, the electrical equipment had been moved to the basement of the community building and the other three buildings were warehouses of one sort or another. Gary's inventory system had been streamlined over the years to eliminate the paper trail entirely. The only paper generated now was the weekly inventory list and it was limited to 4 copies: three for the warehouses and one for the scavengers.

o

Barbara had started scout flights back when they'd gotten the warning from Gunny. However, to date they'd seen no sign of the troublemakers from California. She nevertheless maintained the scout flights, even on Labor Day. Derek used the corporate jet they found at the Denver airport to shuttle between Colorado and New Mexico, spending about 1/3 of his time down south. The flight from Denver to Roswell didn't really take all that long. That old guy, Derek's father, was always pestering Derek to ride along; it seemed that he was convinced there was a flying saucer somewhere in Roswell that he couldn't find. Derek was in New Mexico this weekend and the three old geezers were along.

After 15 years of harping, Gary had finally succeeded in getting someone to humor him and take Clarence, Ron and him out to the ranch that was the site of the famous 1947 crash of the 'flying saucer'. Some of the older Roswell residents actually believed the story, but most of the younger people didn't. Anyone who had been an adult back in 1947 was long dead and buried, so the truth would probably never be known.

What had started out as a joke for Gary had changed over the years as senility began to set in. He'd been quite the boozier in his younger days and then came up with the diabetes in 1991. The diabetes had done a number on his brain over the years, 28 to be exact, and he was about as sharp as an eraser. Anyway, Gary was convinced that the whole flying saucer story was real. It had been 72 years since the event and if there was a single shred of evidence of the crash, it had disappeared years ago. Ron and Clarence decided to humor Gar-Bear for old time's sake and off to the ranch they went.

The actual crash site was on the Foster ranch about 75 miles north of Roswell near Corona. About 1 1/2 hours later their guide drove them to the gate on the ranch. It was locked, but Gary had a key; it was called a Colt M1911. Once inside the gate, the guide showed them the supposed crash site, complete with sign. Gary nosed around for a while and then picked up a piece of shiny foil.

"Ah hah!" Gary said, "I have a piece of the flying saucer."

"Can I see that Gar-Bear?" Ron asked.

Gary handed Ron the piece of foil. Ron looked at both sides, showed it to Clarence and then handed it back to Gary.

"I'd hang on to that if I were your partner, it might be real valuable someday," Ron said winking at Clarence.

Later that night, Ron and Clarence were in a restaurant drinking coffee.

"Are you going to tell him?" Clarence asked.

"Tell him what?" Ron said, "That he has a piece of foil from a cigarette wrapper? No partner, it's harmless enough and old Gar-Bear is just crazy enough to shoot anyone who bursts his bubble."

Derek had heard that his Dad had found something up at Corona. He went to visit with him to see what he'd found.

"Hey Dad, I heard that you found a piece of a flying saucer," Derek said.

"Yeah right," Gary laughed, "Look at it, it's just the top flap out of a pack of cigarettes."

"Then what's all the crap with you shining on Ron and Clarence?" Derek asked.

"They sometimes think I'm crazy, so I figured to give them a reason," Gary was still laughing.

"But Ron's your best friend," Derek protested.

"You should have seen him trying to keep a straight face, Derek," Gary said, "It was all he could do to keep from bursting out laughing. It's an interesting piece of foil, though. Wad it up."

Derek wadded up the piece of cigarette foil. It immediately un-wadded itself and lay flat.

The Rock – Chapter 14 – Firestorm

Derek looked at the piece of foil, then at Gary. Gary winked at him and put the foil in his pocket. It was now a closed subject. Gary decided to find Ron and Clarence and chew the fat. He wasn't about to bring up his piece of foil if they didn't. He found them in the restaurant drinking coffee.

"Hey guys. I appreciate you letting me see the saucer crash site; it's something I've wanted to do for years," Gary said testing the waters.

"No sweat partner, what are friends for?" Ron replied.

"Did you hear about the problems they had down here with the bad guys out of LA?" Gary asked.

"They're not talking about much else," Clarence responded.

"You know that the new General Derek appointed has been running recon flights don't you?" Gary asked.

"What the hell was he thinking appointing a female General?" Ron went off.

"I heard she was a highly recommend Gunny," Clarence said, "So why not?"

"No reason," Ron said, "I just hope it doesn't bother anyone else."

"Ronald, you are a sexist pig," Gary laughed.

"Better that than a nut who believes in flying saucers," Ron laughed.

Gary reached into his pocket and took out the piece of foil.

"Here you go partner, wad up that piece of cigarette foil I found," Gary smirked.

Ron wadded up the foil and tossed it on the table. The foil immediately un-wadded itself and lay flat. Clarence picked up the piece of foil and repeated Ron's action. Again, the foil immediately un-wadded itself and lay flat. Gary picked up the foil and put it in his pocket. Both Ron and Clarence got strange looks on their faces.

"You were saying?" Gary taunted.

"I was saying that I hope that bunch from California doesn't show up in Colorado," Ron sputtered.

"Yeah, me neither," Gary replied.

o

During their absence, Bill had the trench all of the way to the main compound and was running the tunnel in both directions. It was nearing completion and most of it had been covered over with dirt and the sod re-laid. Aaron was on the way back with the last 75 homes. He had advised that they found it necessary to 'fly the birds' as he put it.

They hadn't had a specific threat, he said, but it felt as if they were being watched up in Minnesota, too. Anyway, he had the choppers flying cover and they were going to try and drive straight through to The Farm. His ETA was 24 hours. Derek and Barbara talked it over briefly and she started running recon flights to the northeast. Were they just getting hinky or was something brewing? With the Kiowa's up, it really didn't make much difference.

Derek had long since adopted the five levels of security initiated by Homeland Security many years before. With recon flights up in two directions and a scavenging party considering it necessary to fly air cover, he decided to raise their security level to the Blue or 'Guarded' level.

This condition was declared when there is a general risk of attack. In addition to the protective measures taken in the previous Threat Condition, departments and agencies should consider the following general measures in addition to the agency-specific Protective Measures that they will develop and implement: checking communications with designated emergency response or command locations; reviewing and updating emergency response procedures; and, providing the residents with any information that would strengthen their ability to act appropriately. In plain English it meant keep your eyes and ears open.

Aaron and his people dropped the new homes on their slabs for later assembly and went to bed. The recon flights were not reporting anyone following the group and Barbara was beginning to wonder if Aaron weren't just gun shy. Bill had finished the tunnel and all that remained was to cover over the latest portion and re-lay the sod. Everyone was at home on The Farm for the first time in months. The next morning, Barbara went to Derek with a question.

"How come we have everything walled in except our vehicles and the diesel fuel?" She asked.

"I guess because I've had my head stuck up my butt," Derek said. "With all that's been going on, I never gave it a thought Barbara, but you're right, we should have those tankers and our fleet of vehicles protected. It's awfully late in the year to be pouring concrete, but I don't see that we have any choice. Where do you think we should put the truck park?"

"Well, if we extend it from the wall around the farm buildings, we'll only have to put in 3

walls," Barbara said. "By the way, I've been meaning to tell you that I moved those Patriot batteries out to the far corners of the new sections."

"Good. I'll go see Bill and find out how fast he can slip form a wall around the tankers and trucks," Derek said. "Is there anything else that I've overlooked or forgotten?"

"We need a gate for the farm building compound and the new truck park, but I'll take care of that," Barbara said. "Is it just me or is there an air of unrest going around?"

o

Derek was sure it wasn't just Barbara. Aaron had been spooked for some time now. He knew that something was up, but he couldn't put his finger on it. Gunny had as much as said the same thing the previous week when they were down in New Mexico. Gunny was running their threat level at Blue and had been since the skirmish with those people for LA.

Maybe he had better switch from Kiowa's for recon to the Apaches. The Apaches had one hell of a lot more armament and 4 sidewinder air-to-air missiles. Derek supposed he should call the air group a Wing. They had 52 Apaches and 18 Kiowa Warriors. There were the original 16 Apaches and 8 Kiowa's plus the 4 backup Apaches and 2 backup Kiowa's. That was 20 plus 10. Adding in the 32 new Apaches and 8 new Kiowa's gave him 52 and 18.

He guessed that 70 planes were enough to call a Wing and a Wing was the same thing in his mind as a Regiment, so that must mean he had an Infantry Battalion, an Air Wing and an Armored Regiment. No wait; make that an Infantry Regiment because they had close to a fourth Company of Infantry. Well, part-time, but still...

They were still short aircrews. Derek contacted Gunny and asked if he had 14 aircrews he could spare. Gunny did, but what skills did Derek need? Derek told him 12 Apache crews and 8 Kiowa crews. That would put a crew in every cockpit and give them a fully operational Air Wing in Colorado. Derek also wanted to know how many infantry types might be interested in moving to Colorado. Close to three hundred families had the itch, Gunny said, but did Derek have enough housing for that many people? Derek told him they had brought in 225 homes over the summer and there were 35 still empty in the first tract.

"So you have 260 empty homes, right?" Gunny asked.

"Near as I know, yes," Derek said.

"Do you have room for up to 60 more homes?" Gunny asked.

"I have room for over 200 more Gunny," Derek said, "Why? Do you have more folks wanting to move?"

“No, but I didn’t want them to get there and not have a place to set a home,” Gunny laughed.

The discussion got Derek to thinking. They had 15 homes in tract 2. Then they got the 32 homes for the new aircrews plus 36 homes for the Patriot crews. That made 83 homes. Add to that the 225 Aaron had dragged back the past summer and it meant that they had 308 homes in tract 2 and 500 in tract 1. If Gunny were actually sending up 60 more homes, that would put tract 2 up to 368 homes. One more good summer of locating homes and tract 2 would be full too. They needed to get those last 75 homes set up quickly; he had an idea that Gunny already had the people loading their household goods.

Bill had two slip forms putting up the truck park wall. He was busting his butt trying to beat the snow. The scroungers had been out and come back with enough 1” plate for both gates and the military folks were mounting the Mk-19’s and Ma Deuces as fast as the wall was going up. They were out of Mk-19’s and Ma Deuces, if Bill remembered right, where had these come from?

Bill hadn’t considered the advantages that a Major General with a 20 passenger corporate jet had. Gunny had plenty down in New Mexico he could have given Derek, but it was nearly as easy to fly the jet down to Ft. Hood and load it up with more weapons. The problem was that they had done a pretty good job between the two of them of stripping Ft. Hood by this time. About all that remained were some artillery pieces. But, there were plenty more military installations in the northern parts of the country, so to this point in time, they weren’t particularly worried.

Barbara had the gates hung and most of the weapons installed even before Bill was finished with the truck park wall. Bill was working as fast as he could because he was beginning to get spooked himself. He didn’t know if it was just everyone else’s paranoia rubbing off on him or there was genuinely something to be concerned over. He pushed the slip forms as fast as he dared getting the wall finished. It began to snow just as he was storing his equipment in the truck park. The only walls to be constructed the following summer were the walls around the wind farm. These walls would be shorter, too at five foot rather than the usual 8’.

o

The council was meeting to assess their needs and the current security threat. They considered the 60 tankers of diesel and JP8 too vulnerable and were in the middle of a discussion concerning putting in underground fuel bunkers.

“Look folks,” Aaron said, “We can put in underground bunkers next summer. There are plenty of tanks in the Denver area we can dig up and move. But, the ground is frozen and we’ve been putting off that trip to Palm Springs for months now. As much as I hate to go to California, we need those 75 wind turbines.”

“Those people Gunny sent up have been arriving steadily,” Derek said. “We can’t put on any more of those PV panels until spring so it has us running 3 of the generators. We have enough people and equipment to provide security for the California party and The Farm. If we’re going to get those turbines, we’d better do it now.”

“What are you planning to take to provide cover for my people?” Aaron asked.

“I was thinking maybe 22 Apaches and 2 Kiowa Warriors,” Derek said. “Do you think a dozen Hummer’s, half with Ma Deuces and half with Mk-19’s will be enough?”

“I don’t suppose I could get you to haul a half dozen of the Abrams, could I?” Aaron asked.

“That’s no problem, but if you want armor, you must be expecting trouble,” Derek replied.

“I can’t put my finger on it Derek,” Aaron said, “But the hair is standing up on the back of my neck.”

“If that’s the case, we’ll make it 18 of the Ma Deuce equipped Hummer’s plus the 6 with the Mk-19’s,” Derek grimaced. “My saintly old father (that brought on a few snickers) always told me more is better.”

“If we could take enough people, we could be in and out of there before anyone knew we were there,” Aaron suggested.

“You’ll have the 24 ground crews to help, unless there is trouble,” Derek reminded Aaron. “That’s 96 people right there and they’re all mechanics.”

“With my people and the ground crews, we’ll need about 48 of the farm hands,” Aaron replied. “Figure 4 days onsite plus another 4 days travel time. If we work at it, we can have the turbines up in running in a little over 2 weeks’ time.”

“Assuming you don’t run into trouble,” Derek said.

“That’s right Derek, assuming we don’t run into trouble,” Aaron replied gravely.

“We’ll load the aircraft tonight and be ready to leave at 8am,” Derek said. “I’m going to call Gunny and ask him to send over 2 companies of infantry,” Derek concluded. “If you don’t have any trouble, you’ll just get done that much quicker. If you do, they may come in handy.”

o

Gunny would send the two companies, he said, but only for a few days. They had been

picking up some suspicious radio traffic and were already at Threat Level Yellow, Elevated. Derek didn't spend much time thinking about that; they had taken out about 3,000 of the bad guys back when they had a small air group.

He raised the Threat Level to Yellow and got the Apaches and Kiowa's loaded. All they needed was two long weeks for energy independence. And, if anyone bothered either The Farm or the California expedition, they were in for one hell of a surprise. He sent along several reloads for the choppers, just in case.

Aaron and the people from Colorado arrived in Indio within minutes of the New Mexicans. They stopped long enough to launch the two Kiowa's and proceeded to the wind farm in the Palm Springs area. They found the towers they wanted and the control room within an hour. The Kiowa's maintained an eye on the area during the daylight hours and they put up two of the Apaches after dark. The work was proceeding smoothly and they were getting ahead of schedule. About mid-morning of the second day, the Kiowa's reported smoke off in the distance to the west. The ground crews stopped long enough to pre-flight the remaining Apaches and returned to the task. By evening they had 50 of the 75 towers aboard the semi-trailers and the control room aboard another.

They stopped and had dinner after dark. The glow was evident in the western sky. Aaron decided to send the 50 towers and control panel back to Colorado first thing in the morning. Meanwhile he put up 4 of the Apaches to provide security. The next morning, they dispatched the 50 towers and control panel together with the 2 Kiowa's and 4 Apaches back to Colorado. The 6 ground crews accompanied the aircraft and they took but a single reload for the choppers. A single Ma Deuce equipped Hummer led the convoy and a single Mk-19 equipped Hummer brought up the rear. After they left, everyone except the pilots of the airborne choppers pitched in to get the other 25 towers down. By dark, they had them down and strapped down on the trailers. Aaron was prepared to spend the night and leave the next morning, but the Apaches reported a long column of headlights on I-10 west of Banning.

The 16 Apaches on the ground were quickly pre-flighted and sent aloft. The other two landed, refueled and joined them. The trailers left immediately for Colorado accompanied by 2 Apaches and 2 Hummer's. The New Mexican Infantry companies and the ground crews plus the Hummer's remained behind to provide a rear guard if it were needed.

Everyone was taking I-10 eastbound to I-25 this trip and presumably going their separate ways. The rear guard departed 1 hour after the trailers, having never had contact with whoever was coming in from the west. All of that changed as they approached Blythe. The 16 Apaches had just refueled and taken off when they discovered a long caravan of vehicles speeding in from the west. They assumed the people were the bad guys, but to be sure one of the Apaches buzzed the caravan. The steams of gunfire told them all they needed to know. The 4 Mk-19 equipped Hummer's rushed to the west, opening up as soon as they were in range. The Apaches regrouped and stood off, launching their Hellfire missiles.

The caravan ground to a flaming halt. The Apache pilots included those who had been a party to the action up on I-76 years back. They raked the column of vehicles from a standoff distance, just in case the Californians had any more of the Stinger missiles.

The Hummer's maintained a rear guard while the choppers rearmed and refueled. The trailers were rolling along I-10, pedal to the metal, unaccompanied by their defense forces. In truth, there was no way the Hummer's could keep up with the Kenworths and Peterbilts anyway and the Apaches stayed with the Hummers. The Abrams didn't even unload; they just fired their guns into the caravan after the Hummer's pulled back. They figured that would slow down the Californians for a while and resumed their drive to the east, pedal to the metal, at 55mph.

Most of the survivors were of the opinion that the best defense was a good offense. They certainly had that caravan of vehicles outgunned and had stopped them dead in their tracks. The only problem was that the bad guys had an air force of their own in the form of a Bell 206 Jet Ranger or two. The aircraft was essentially the same airframe as the Kiowa.

This particular chopper had a camo paint job and extra fuel tanks. Its maximum range wasn't 299 miles; it was more on the order of 600 miles. It carried a single pilot and he was very, very good. He kept his chopper down in the weeds, and he layback preventing the Apache pilots from noticing him on their fire control radars. Extra fuel was available for the pilot in Las Vegas, Phoenix and Albuquerque. Given the slow forward progress of the Apaches, Hummer's and M1000's, he had no difficulty maintaining his distance. It took him barely 15 minutes to refuel in Phoenix and he continued to follow them to the east on I-10.

o

The vehicles turned north on I-25 at Las Cruces and some of them split off on US 70 to the east. But the Apaches continued north on I-25, following the military vehicles. The pilot had enough fuel to make it to Albuquerque, but he jugged when he should have jagged and an Apache picked him up. He had been radioing each position change back to a similarly equipped 206 that was about 200 miles behind him. The Apache pilot dropped down in the weeds himself and when the 206 passed him, pulled up behind him and fired 2 sidewinders.

The pilot of the 206 never knew what hit him but his companion chopper immediately changed course for Albuquerque. The second pilot assumed, correctly, that he could intercept the Apache flight in the Albuquerque area. He arrived in Albuquerque, refueled and was waiting on the ground when the convoy and Apaches passed through Albuquerque on their way to Colorado.

The second pilot could only assume that the first chopper had been caught and shot down. The convoy stopped just north of the I-40 junction and refueled the Apaches. He

sat there patiently until he saw the Apaches airborne once more. Only then did he fire up his engine and begin to follow.

The distance from Albuquerque to Denver is about 440 miles. Actually the road atlas says 437 miles, but from where in Albuquerque to where in Denver? The second pilot was much more cautious than his late companion. He managed to follow the convoy all of the way to Colorado, setting down when the Apaches stopped to refuel again. He continued to follow and eventually they cut off on US 24 at Colorado Springs.

This was pretty open country and he decided to lay back a bit more, barely keeping the Apaches in sight. He managed to make it all the way to state route 71 before he ran into trouble. Minutes after his last radio report, he came within range of those Patriot missile batteries phased array radar. As it happened, one of the Apache pilots was communicating with the southwest Patriot battery when they picked up the 206. The pilot joined his companion, succumbing to a pair of sidewinders, but it was way too late.

o

Some of the Patriot missile batteries deployed at The Farm used the latest, PAC-3, missiles. Each unit consisted of 6 launchers each with 16 missiles, the phased radar array unit and a control center. The PAC-2 batteries had 6 launchers each with 4 missiles. The difference in the two types of systems was miniaturization and use of a hit to kill vehicle. In addition, each unit had its own power source in the form of a trailer-mounted generator. The total crew for each battery was 6 people. Gunny had not only sent the six units, but several reloads for each unit. The PAC-3 missiles had an operational range on the order of 30km and the PAC-2 an operational range of 160km so The Farm had an extensive air umbrella.

True to his word, Aaron had the wind turbines up and connected in 4 days. The control panel was slightly different from the panel removed from Tehachapi, however, and it took a full week to figure it out and complete its installation. That actually worked out well because a few of the generators needed an overhaul before the complete system could be brought online.

When the word spread about shooting down the two helicopters, everyone at The Farm was on edge. Barbara deployed 1 Abrams plus 3 hummer's to each of the outlying Patriot batteries to provide them cover, just in case. With nothing more specific to act upon, the Threat Level remained at Yellow, but most of the residents acted as if they were already at Orange. Thanksgiving was a most interesting holiday in November of 2019 and they almost ran out of places to stack the weapons at the Thanksgiving dinner.

One other item of interest wasn't discussed at the dinner at all. Old Gar-Bear had been examining his little piece of foil under a magnifying glass for some time. Under just the right light, a holographic image could be seen. It said, D-u-P-o-n-t. Gary had no idea what the piece of foil/plastic was and saw no reason to dispel any misconceptions that Ron, Clarence or Derek might have.

o

During the 15 years since the strike, none of the folks from New Mexico, Colorado nor any of the transplants had presumed that they were the only group of scroungers. Scrounging had become a way of life for many until factories began to slowly reappear in the southern states. And despite the factories, most of the trade was still regional by its very nature.

The US was no longer a nation bound together by a series of well-maintained interstate highways and rail transportation arteries. Fifteen years of seasons and lack of maintenance had taken their toll, especially in the northern parts of the country. Perhaps that explained, in part, why the folks in New Mexico and more especially Colorado had not come under attack from roving bands more often.

The folks from The Farm and New Mexico had every reason to be leery of the people in California. There were the rural communities, like up in the Coalinga area and Bakersfield and the like where the people were just your regular folks.

On the other hand, Los Angeles had been an area of constant strife. In all of their travels to the Los Angeles area, the Coloradoans had never really gotten into LA proper. They went to outlying areas like the City of Industry and the like, but never got near to LA itself. Had they done so, they would have found a far different Los Angeles than any of them ever imagined.

People that returned to Los Angeles after the strike back in 2004 were met with violence. The bad guys had formed, at first, a loose collation to resist the LEO's and military. After a few successful encounters with both, the bad guys were well equipped with military hardware.

The lawless element had one distinct advantage over the military people brought in to restore order; this was their home turf. Greater Los Angeles is a huge city covering thousands of square miles and provisioned to meet the daily needs of millions of people, there was no end to the stores available to the few thousand bad guys. The actual city is almost 500 square miles, not counting the urban areas.

Eventually the LEO's and military were overcome and later the Marine Corp detachment at Camp Pendleton fell apart due to a lack of pay, dwindling supplies and no leadership from on high. Slowly, inexorably, the troops took their weapons and belongings and looked for greener pastures, leaving behind a wide array of heavy military equipment, heavy weapons and munitions.

One has to remember that Camp Pendleton was a Marine Corp training facility. As such, it had a lot of weapons and more than just practice ammo. And, just as eventually, the bad guys moved on Pendleton and began to equip themselves with real military hardware.

Some of the equipment at Pendleton was beyond the mental capabilities of the Los Angeles crowd to manage, but they had a few veterans in their midst and except for some of the truly sophisticated equipment and aircraft, they came to be able to use the majority of the equipment.

In a desperate move the few remaining good people in the greater Los Angeles area had, late in 2019, put up one final struggle against the criminal element. The bad guys had long since adopted what we would call a scorched earth policy and they burned and destroyed as they moved against the resistance.

The smoke from their fires could be seen from as far away as Palm Springs. Finally, the surviving good guys had bugged out to the east. The bad guys had followed in a pair of Bell 206 Jet Rangers, just to keep tabs on the fleeing citizens.

West of Blythe, the fleeing good guys had been buzzed by an Apache helicopter and assuming the worst had opened fire on the Apache. I believe the ensuing battle was recounted earlier in this account. What can one say? Stuff Happens! Or, as James T. Kirk had said in the old TV series or a subsequent movie, 'One little mistake!' (*Star Trek IV The Voyage Home*) The two helicopters belonging to the bad guys picked up on the convoy of military vehicles and...

o

The tension was high in New Mexico and in Colorado. Gunny had pushed his Threat Level to Orange, but Derek and Barbara kept The Farm at Yellow. Life went on; the cows didn't know anything about any alert levels and they still had to be milked twice a day. The milk had to be converted to cheese or allowed to spoil and it was far too precious to be allowed to spoil. Livestock had to be butchered and the meat distributed or canned. And, of course, the equipment needed to be maintained.

With Christmas coming on, the residents went in groups to Denver to see if there was anything left that they could use as Christmas presents. Barbara maintained the recon flights, but with nothing more than a feeling and the experience with the two helicopters to press her, began to consider lowering the Threat level back to Blue, or Guarded.

The weather was typical for Colorado for the month of December and it permitted some of the folks an opportunity to get to the range to hone their skills. The range had been relocated several times, usually because of the building program. They finally put in what they hoped was a permanent 1000-meter range west of the airfield on the other side of the road. Gary, Ron and Clarence went to watch, they really weren't into shooting much these days. Besides, the population of The Farm had grown to almost 3,200 and the range only accommodated about 100 shooters at a time.

The council had decided, at the meeting held after the new wind turbines were online, to not allow further growth of the community from without. An exception could be made for

a critical skill, like a doctor or something, but otherwise, the inherent population growth of the 3,200 people would fill the remaining 132 mobile homes when they were acquired.

The summer of 2020 would be devoted to finding those 132 homes, replenishing their fuel supplies and some low-level scrounging to maintain the inventories of things they still couldn't produce. Then, there was the issue of the underground fuel bunkers to address. They also had the PV panels to install and the porches to build for a goodly number of homes. Finally, there was the wall that Bill was going to install around the wind farm.

The only pieces of military hardware Derek and Barbara wanted to acquire were another 24 of the M119A2 artillery pieces to place in the park of tract 2. Derek had started out with 18 pieces and then left half of them in New Mexico. The subsequent trip to Ft. Hood had brought back 15 pieces, making their battery 24 of the M119A2s. Although neither of them considered it a particularly high priority, come summer, they intended to go to Ft. Hood one last time.

◦

Out in California, the bad guys were planning on a spring offensive. Most of them rarely had seen snow except for the period after the strike and none of them were particularly good drivers when it came to moving around in the ice and snow. They were 'typical California drivers' from the southern portion of the state. They were starting to become a bit desperate, too.

They had done a pretty thorough job of depleting the fuel supplies of southern California. They knew about stuff like PRI-D and the like, but no one knew how to run a refinery and though there was a reasonable quantity of unrefined fuel at the refinery in Long Beach, it was useless to them. Neither did they grow gardens and no one had seen fresh produce beyond that which grew naturally on the millions of citrus, nut and fruit trees. Fifteen years of taking without replacing had made southern California pretty much a wasteland.

Based on the last reports of the helicopters that had been following the fleeing good guys and later a military convoy of some kind, the leaders of the group figured their best shot was in going to Colorado. Colorado was farm country, right? Even if the farmers did have a couple of helicopters and a tank or two they wouldn't be a match for the well-equipped group from Los Angeles. The snow should be all gone in May, so they started making preparations for the attack.

The Rock – Chapter 15 – Final Moments

Derek contacted Gunny to see if he needed any of the M119A2 cannons. Gunny informed Derek that he'd had his folks over to Ft. Hood and cleaned out the cannons, but he could send some to Colorado, how many did Derek want? Derek told him 2-dozen and any ammo he could spare. Around mid-February, the convoy from New Mexico showed up with the 24 guns and two trailer loads of M-1 ammo. It was less ammo than Derek and Barbara had hoped for, they'd never be able to fight WW IV they joked, but it was probably more than they could use in any likely firefight. They did have a quantity of M546 APERS-T 105-mm rounds (Beehive).

Gunny had been busy gathering more doublewides and he not only sent the trailers, he sent occupants for the trailers. While the 68 doublewides were more than welcome, the council had voted to not accept any more outsiders into the community. Derek promptly drafted the new residents and announced that they were military transfers and exempt from the limitation. The addition put them at 436 homes in tract 2, meaning that a single trip should complete the housing unit. And, the new families raised the population of the development from 3,196 to 3,427.

During the first months of 2020, the tension at the farm was so thick you could almost cut it with a knife. They did a hasty inventory of their fuel and discovered that running those generators had eaten into their supplies more than they liked. A third of their tankers were empty so they filled 5 of them with JP8 from the Denver airport and sent the other 15 up to Cheyenne for more diesel. They weren't going to be able to get fuel from Cheyenne much longer either, so the need for those underground fuel bunkers was becoming even more urgent. Back in the caverns, they had a 3 million gallon storage capacity, but here in Colorado they still only had the 4 18,000-gallon underground tanks.

o

None of the building at The Farm had been the subject of any overall planning. With the influx of those 68 families that Gunny had sent up from New Mexico, the council decided to re-think some of their decisions. They had a map of the northwest section of that showed all of the facilities drawn in to scale. If the map was accurate, there was just enough room between the original tract and the truck park to fit in a third tract. Moreover, if that were indeed the case and they eliminated the wall between a possible third tract and a fourth tract, they could conceivably put in walls for a third and fourth tract over the course of one summer. And, so far as the fuel bunker or bunkers were concerned, why not put them in the truck park and under the airfield?

Bill allowed as how he could get the wall in for the two tracts during a single summer and perhaps they could get his now partner down in New Mexico to come north and work on the fuel bunkers. He went further and suggested that if they scrounged around Denver and came up with enough steel forms, he could draft a group of the newer residents to form up slabs in the two tracts. He pointed out, however that they had used up

the last of the steel building components so in addition of scrounging the steel forms, someone was going to have to come up with more of the building components. The three old geezers were sitting in on the meeting and Gary told Aaron there was a large steel building company in Des Moines, he thought the name of the company was Abuild or something like that.

Aaron wasn't particularly worried about the steel buildings, but the idea of locating and hauling in 1,000 additional doublewides was certainly frightening. To do that over the course of 2, 3 or even 4 years was going to be a terrible job. There just weren't that many new doublewides out there anymore. The third and fourth tracts, if they got built at all, were going to have to settle for used doublewides. And, used homes meant dismantling the homes, hauling them and reassembly. The only salvation he saw in the whole thing was that it didn't take one hell of a lot of agricultural people to cultivate the land, so maybe this suggestion had possibilities.

The man in charge of utilities pointed out that if they added 1,000 homes, they were going to need more generators, wind turbines and a lot of those PV panels. And then he brought up the subject of all of the plumbing, additional septic fields and the miles of wire they would need. His thought was that they should try and scrounge all of the infrastructure components the first year and worry about the homes later on. Given the fact that they already had the cart in front of the horse in tract 2, his argument made sense. They voted to add the two tracts during the summer and other than bringing in the 64 homes they needed to complete tract 2, to devote their scrounging efforts to pipe and wire, generators and wind turbines and the septic systems.

And, not to burst anyone's bubble, but strictly in the practical sense, other concerns were raised. They still didn't have a water tower and there was simply no way that the wells in the first tract could supply water for another 1,000 homes. As it was, the small 5,000-gallon tank they had installed and the pump system was overburdened. If they were going to do the utilities correctly, it was suggested they'd better get in a water tower and put in a new, larger well.

Bill butted in with a concern over the wall around the wind farm. Should he just wall in twice as large an area? Could he do that and still wall in two tracts, he was asked. Yes, but they were going to have need of a second portable concrete plant, he explained. And, someone had better figure out how to get those railcars of cement out to The Farm, he was wasting a lot of time hauling in the cement. He also pointed out that all of their plans were subject to the weather and the absence of trouble from any bad guys.

o

There were other concerns raised at the meeting, too. Their dentist had come out of retirement to practice again and he said he couldn't keep going any longer. They were going to have to shop for a replacement. Their doctor pointed out that they needed a larger medical facility for so many residents and he could use some help. He went on to point out that they had already pushed the age of their pharmaceuticals to 1½ times any

reasonable shelf life and that they were going to have to do something to try and find fresher medicines.

Now, this was a tall order. They asked him to prepare a list of drugs with 'indefinite' shelf lives and a list of products they would have to find new replacements for. They didn't see any reason why one of the new community buildings couldn't be turned into a full time hospital/clinic and there was more than enough medical equipment in the Denver area hospitals.

One of the things Derek had learned on his last trip to New Mexico was that the New Mexicans were replacing their drugs from South American sources. He just hoped that whatever the doctor needed was available through Gunny's sources South America.

Aaron and his people had been slowly accumulating more gold and silver over the years since the move to Colorado and if the drugs didn't come at too high a price, they might be able to get by. But, was gold and silver the medium of exchange that the New Mexicans had used to acquire the drugs? In California, fuel was the medium of exchange, so one never knew about these things; he'd have to ask. Maybe diamonds, he thought. You couldn't eat them and they literally had boxes full of the little paper envelopes scrounged from jewelry stores all the way from Kansas to Wisconsin.

The council meeting lasted an entire day and well into the evening. There were many concerns, some more pressing than others. There hadn't been many medical issues come up since the move to Colorado. The hard work and clean living seemed to agree with everyone's health. Isolated as they were, they hadn't had a single case of the flu in the entire time they had been in Colorado. Medical emergencies were limited to the mundane and routine, like broken bones and the occasional cold. The people worked hard and lived healthy. Junk foods and all of those sugar products that had been the bane of American existence 16 years before had disappeared. The only 'fast foods' were leftovers served up cold from the refrigerator.

o

Derek and Barbara flew down to Roswell to meet with Gunny. They wanted to address the issue of the drugs and get a feel for his assessment of their overall security situation. The medium of exchange Gunny had been using to acquire drugs had been military armaments. He said that they should have enough leftover military hardware lying around in the northern states to keep them in drugs for a lifetime; it was amazing what you could get for 2 Abrams tanks and 200 rounds of 120mm cannon shells. So far as security was concerned, he was picking up a lot more radio traffic from California and he, by God, was staying at Orange. He recommended that Derek and Barbara consider doing the same.

Derek, the Gunny said, didn't remember his history. Go talk to his Dad if he wanted to know what increased radio traffic meant. But, the long and short of it was that as an Army or Navy got ready to attack, their invariably increased their radio traffic trying to get

everything arranged. It had been like that ever since the radio had come into widespread use by the military. It just seemed to Gunny that the group out in California was pretty well equipped with military radios and if they had radios, they probably had everything else one typically found on a military base. If they'd cleaned out Camp Pendleton or someplace like that, someone was in a world of hurts if they were attacked.

That was food for thought. They flew back to Denver and left the Threat Level at Yellow rather than reducing it to Blue. Derek gave the doctor the list of drugs Gunny said were available from South America, Gunny never said from which country, and asked the doctor to put together a list of what he needed based on what was available.

Down in New Mexico they had 4 dentists and 2 doctors in each of the communities. It was just a matter of persuading some of them to move to Colorado. Gunny had said that the Medical School at Baylor was back in operation so perhaps the medical situation wasn't as bad as they thought.

Derek took Gunny's advice and cornered his Dad to talk about radio communications and the like. Gary was off and running, talking about things like the increased radio traffic that had led the Americans to discover the impending attack at Midway Island during WW II and so forth.

Gary wanted to know what had led Derek to ask about a subject like that. Derek explained that Gunny had been picking up a sharp increase in radio traffic on the military frequencies from California. Gary wanted to know what Derek had in mind to deal with a situation like that. If the bad guys got the equipment at Camp Pendleton, The Farm could be in a world of hurts.

By this time, Derek was getting just a little tired of hearing about how much trouble Camp Pendleton could pose for them. The Marine Corps relied more on mobility than on heavy firepower. Maybe the bad guys had some 155mm cannons, but he had an air force that could wipe out those cannons in a New York minute.

The key, he felt, was getting sufficient notice of a pending attack. Maybe they should put those Kiowa Warriors to better use and expand the perimeter to the Colorado state line. With enough warning, they could ambush any would be attacker. That would be especially necessary if the attacker had anti-aircraft missiles and heavy artillery. They would have to cut the enemy down to size before they ever got to The Farm if it were in fact a large, well-equipped enemy.

o

Barbara agreed completely with Derek's assessment. She suggested that they send the Kiowa's out in pairs with a couple of Hummer's and a tanker of fuel. Derek was quick to point out that they only had 9 tankers of JP8, including the 5 extra tankers they'd filled recently, and they really didn't have time to go shopping for tankers. The lack of preparedness with respect to the fuel bunkers was starting to pinch!

Barbara excused herself and went to talk to Aaron. Were there any refueling vehicles at the Denver airport, she wanted to know? A few, she was told, but like a lot of airports, Denver refueled aircraft mainly from an underground system. She said she only needed 9 for the moment, and asked Aaron to see what he could get and bring them back full of JP8.

Barbara told Derek she was working on the fuel problem and they began to examine the map to see where they should station the Kiowa's. The odds favored people coming their way from California one of three ways, via I-80, I-70 or I-25. If they stationed units in Cheyenne, Loveland Pass and Trinidad, they would have a big jump on any bad guys and plenty of time to set up an ambush.

That meant that they would only need to send out six of the Kiowa's. Maybe they could get Gunny, she suggested, keeping an eye on the Albuquerque area. And, she said, why not put the corporate jet to good use and fly a wide circle intersecting I-80 and I-70 further to the west? Barbara suggested that they probably had until late April or early May before they had to worry, she doubted that those people from California would be likely to want to drive on snow and ice.

Aaron was back in a few hours with 10 of the 12,000-gallon refueling trucks and Barbara and Derek got someone to check out the ground crews on the use of the Ma Deuce equipped Hummer's they intended to send along, just in case. The Hummer's were all M1025 and M1026's; the only difference being whether or not the vehicles had a winch.

o

Although the bad guys numbered nearly 30,000, not everyone was in favor of traveling halfway across the country on a maybe. About $\frac{2}{3}$ of their number decided they would just head east and see how they could do in that direction. They divided the spoils from Camp Pendleton more or less proportionally and headed to San Bernardino to pick up I-15 to Barstow and I-40. It was the last week of April 2020. Short on fuel as they were, they crammed 25 men to a truck.

They had opted to take only the self-propelled M109, 155mm howitzers. The self-propelled artillery units had a range of over 200 miles, but could only travel at 35mph. And, the tracked vehicles were never intended to be driven for long distances over hard surfaced roads. Early on they realized their mistake, but they were committed. They crawled along; stopping periodically to refuel the M109's and/or repair a track.

Gunny hadn't needed to be asked to station an advance force in Albuquerque; he was way ahead of Derek and Barbara. In fact, he had moved half of his Abrams to Albuquerque and had them strung out along west I-40 ready to ambush anyone who came along. He had two Kiowa's stationed in Gallup to give them advance warning. Gunny had another contingent of tanks in Las Cruces together with two more of the Kiowa's

operating out of Lordsburg. They had all of the obvious and less obvious approaches to their areas of operation covered.

The distance from Los Angeles to Albuquerque is a little over 800 miles. It took the bad guys 4 days to cover the distance and they were traveling 12 hours a day. The M109's were proving to be almost more trouble than they were worth. Gunny's Kiowa's were operating nearly to Holbrook and he had plenty of advance notice of the approaching bad guys.

He got on the radio and gave Barbara a heads up and pulled his tanks back from Las Cruces to defend his home turf. The Kiowa's reported that the bad guys had 'several' of the M1097 Stinger equipped Hummer's and one or more of the variants of the TOW equipped Hummer's. They also reported a large contingent of the M109's bringing up the rear of the formation.

o

Derek and Barbara decided to leave the Kiowa's placed as they were, but moved The Farm to Threat Level Orange. Half of the Apaches, the 9 tankers of JP8 and the 32 Abrams were dispatched to Trinidad to ambush the bad guys. Derek suggested that Gunny try and concentrate on taking out the missile equipped Hummer's and the M109's and they would do the same. Until they could eliminate the Stinger equipped Hummer's, their Apaches wouldn't be of much use.

As usual, Gunny was way ahead of Derek on the battle plan and he had placed explosive charges on several of the bridges and overpasses on the western approaches to Albuquerque. The only concession he made to Derek was to blow the bridges and overpasses immediately, well before the bad guys made an appearance.

The Kiowa's reported that the bad guys had 13 of the Stinger equipped Hummer's and 19 of the TOW equipped variants. Gunny made the 13 Hummer's his number 1 priority. With them gone, his Apaches had a chance to take on the TOW units. He figured that there were probably a few shoulder-launched Stingers among the convoy, but the pilots would just have to deal with those when they were launched.

The 25mm Bushmaster cannons on his Bradley's ought to be able to take care of those Stinger equipped Hummer's and his Abrams should be able to eliminate the M109's. It really didn't make much difference how carefully he planned anyway, he figured, a battle plan never survived the first shot being fired.

Six hours later, around 9pm, the first bad guy units began to arrive in Albuquerque. Gunny held his fire, wanting to take advantage of the night and allowing the bad guys to congest their forces. He assumed that the bad guys would dismount until they figured a way around the downed overpasses and bridges. That should give his sniper teams a chance to take out anyone equipped with shoulder-launched Stinger missiles. Once his Bradley's and snipers eliminated the Stinger's, his Apaches with their FLIR systems

could take on the TOW's. And with the TOW's eliminated, his Abrams would have free rein.

o

Although Gunny had dropped the bridges and overpasses, it only slowed the bad guys, but didn't stop them. Within a half hour, they had their vehicles bypassing the bridges and overpasses using the off ramps. That half hour was all that Gunny needed. His snipers targeted people who dismounted with Stingers and the Bradleys' took out all 13 of the Stinger equipped Hummer's. The bad guys reciprocated and used their TOW equipped Hummer's to take out several of the Bradley's. Gunny put up his Apache's to eliminate as many of the TOW's equipped vehicles as they could manage, reserving his Abrams until the threat was lessened. The choppers struck the TOW equipped Hummer's, but more people appeared with the shoulder-launched Stinger's. The snipers took out as many as they could, but they were outnumbered and a few of the Stinger's were launched.

Gunny lost 2 of his Apaches in the exchange, but they managed to eliminate 12 of the TOW equipped Hummer's. He gave his Abrams commander's a weapons free status and they began to attack the M109's, which were now bunched up just west of Albuquerque. With the bad guy's vehicles congested as they were, the Abrams were unopposed and they destroyed or damaged most of the M109's. Around 3am, Gunny decided that he'd inflicted about as much damage as he could afford and began to withdraw his forces to the south. He had spotters on east I-40 and north and south I-25 and could report the bad guys' next move to Derek.

While Gunny was withdrawing, the bad guys regrouped and reassessed their situation. All of their Stinger equipped and all but 7 of their TOW equipped Hummer's were out of action. They still had about 20 shoulder-launched Stinger's, and could repair 10 of the M109's. They had lost about 8,000 of their number and were down but not out. They sure as hell hadn't expected the level of opposition they had encountered in Albuquerque.

They had 7,000 of the 10,000 people left out of the force they intended to send to Colorado. The remaining 15,000 men and women would be sent in pursuit of their attackers to the south on I-25. The 10 repaired M109's would go to Colorado, they decided, the country was more open and afforded the artillery a better area from which to operate. They'd lost some of their trucks, however and would have to cram 30 people in each of the remaining trucks. The TOW equipped Hummer's would join the southbound forces and half of the Stinger's would go with each unit.

Despite their careful preparations Derek realized that they had some serious holes in their defense. Basically those holes came in the form of their defenses against infantry. With the Abrams, Bradley's and helicopters, they were good to go against any vehicular mounted attack, but if an enemy came against them on foot and armed with weapons

like the AT-4, the Javelin (FGM-148) , Predator (FGM-172 SRAW) or Stinger (FIM-92) missiles, they were in trouble.

The AT-4's were effective against the armored Hummer's and Bradley's and the Predator and Javelin would take out any main battle tank, including the Abrams with its over-the-top method of attack. They had already experienced what a Stinger missile could do in the hands of an experienced opponent. And, they only had 4 companies of infantry in Colorado including the reserves. Of course, there was the militia...

A direct assault on The Farm would put the attacker up against about 2,000 people behind the foot thick walls and the minefields. When they got Gunny's report that several thousand bad guys were headed their way with 10 of the M109's, they were already in place in Trinidad with the 32 Abram A3s.

Gunny also told them that it appeared to his observers that all of the TOW's were southbound on I-25, but he wasn't sure if they'd taken out all of the individual Stingers or not. Gunny told Derek to assume that the bad guys had 'at least a few' AT-4's, Javelins and/or Predators. The New Mexicans planned to draw the southbound bad guys to Alamogordo and make their stand in that area. He said that he figured the terrain in the area gave him a bit of an advantage.

o

Derek advised his tank force commander to eliminate the remaining M109's and as many of the Stinger's and Hummer's as they saw. The on-scene commander should then bring in the Apaches, as he saw fit, and eliminate as many of the enemy vehicles as possible. He should then withdraw to The Farm, using the Apaches as cover. Most of the Stingers, Derek later learned, were in the hands of inexperienced operators and they weren't nearly the threat they would have been had not Gunny's snipers taken out so many of the experienced Stinger operators.

It was near evening on the following day when the Californians put in an appearance in the Trinidad area. The Abrams commanders allowed the trucks to pass and concentrated on the M109's, eliminating them for good. The contingent of Bradleys' waited until the M109's had been eliminated and opened fire, along with the Hummers, on the truckloads of people and enemy Hummers. The Apaches held back out of fear of the Stinger missiles, but were nevertheless able to destroy many of the vehicles proceeding north on I-25.

This victory was small; the enemy had expended all 10 of its remaining Stingers but had not managed to shoot down any of the Apaches. By final count, Derek's forces had destroyed 73 trucks and the 10 M109's. Half of those trucks were Hummer's equipped with Ma Deuces or Mk-19's, but 37 of them held troops, cutting the enemy's infantry by nearly 1,000.

The Abrams, Bradley's, Hummers and tankers headed up US 350, hoping to get ahead

of the intruders. While the enemy force was still within range of the Apaches, they continued to attack, eliminating an additional 81 vehicles. The attacks slowed the bad guys and Derek's forces cleared the junction with US 24 several hours ahead of the invaders. When the forward observers reported that the bad guys had reached the US 24/state route 71 junction, The Farm went on Red Alert. They ordered the Patriot missile batteries to withdraw back to the compound and manned the walls.

Several of the residents were former Marines and Army troops who had given up on the military and departed years earlier to become civilians. All of them had brought their issue weapons and more than a few had brought an M240B, 7.62x51 caliber machine gun or two and all of the ammo they could carry. The two compounds and the other walled in sections were well defended. Unfortunately, not every compound was protected by minefields, but they had done the best they could. They still had nearly a day to wait for the attack. The Kiowa's were equipped with their mini-guns and they kept up a steady barrage of harassing fire on the approaching enemy, slowing, but not stopping them.

o

Had the bad guys had a brain among them, they would have given up long before and sought greener pastures. Out of the 10,000 men and women who had left California for Colorado, barely 3,000 remained. They were down to a couple of Hummer's, out of Stingers, had no artillery and were bone tired. But, their hunger drove them onward.

Down in New Mexico, the enemy wasn't much better off. Only 4,000 or so of the 15,000 who had departed Albuquerque to the south were still able to fight. They weren't faring nearly as well as the Colorado force because the New Mexico militia was out in force. With only 4,000 left out of 20,000 who had left California to head east past Albuquerque; their future looked very bleak indeed. Some of them had enough and attempted to withdraw, but the Kiowa's with their mini-guns stopped them in their tracks.

Had the intruders in New Mexico had more discipline, it might have been a different story, but they were totally undisciplined and most preferred to fire their weapons in the full auto or 3-round burst mode. While their fire accounted for some of the casualties, the 40mm grenades launched from the M203's were far more destructive. Even so, the ratio of casualties was running nearly 30 bad guys to every New Mexican.

The New Mexicans had the advantage of cover, and more importantly, organization. Gunny might have a star on his collar, but he was still a Gunnery Sergeant at heart and both his regular troops and the militia were well schooled. They knew not to use the 3-round burst on their A2s, rather to select their shots and make them count. The battle wore on but eventually the bad guys fell to the steady, aimed fire. Gunny told the people to clean up the bodies and something in his tone suggested that there had better not be anything but bodies.

Waiting was getting to Derek more than Barbara, maybe that was the difference be-

tween a soldier and a Marine. More likely, though, it was the difference in their level of responsibility.

“I’d give my eyeteeth for a couple of those AC-130 Spectre gunships right about now,” Derek commented.

“Well, if we get through this, I have an idea where we might come up with one or two, assuming we can find someone to fly them,” Barbara replied, “But in the meantime we ought to get those Kiowa’s fitted out with mini-guns and in the air.”

The Armed OH-58D’s universal weapons pylons offer quick-change selection of the helicopter’s diverse weapons systems. Flexible firepower enabled the Kiowa Warrior to effectively engage both hard and soft targets, static or stationary, on the ground or in the air.

In addition to its scout/attack role, the OH-58D could be optionally equipped to perform other important missions. The equipment kits that accommodate these missions are easily installed on existing hard points. The mini-guns were leftovers from the original OH-58A’s. However, it hadn’t taken much work to modify an existing equipment kit to accept the Dillon Aero 134D-H mini-guns and 4,400 rounds of the 7.62x51mm ammo. It was downright surprising what a crew chief could do when he or she saw a need.

Typically, the D model could choose between a Hellfire module, a Hydra 70 Folding Fin Aerial Rocket module, Air-to-Air Stinger missiles or a .50 caliber machinegun module, an addition for the D model. All of Gunny’s Kiowa’s and all of Derek’s Kiowa’s had the same modification, though Gunny preferred to use the mini-guns most of the time.

Barbara issued a recall order to the Kiowa’s still stationed on I-80 and I-70 to RTB. The units on I-25 were already back. Derek called the airfield and instructed them to switch both modules on all of the Kiowa’s to the mini-gun modules and to preflight 14 of the Apaches to accompany the Kiowa’s, just in case. Derek headed to the airfield via the tunnel to give the Kiowa pilots their instructions. When he got there he explained that they were going to be his Spectre gunships and take on the bad guy infantry. The Apaches would go along to provide cover and attempt to take any remaining bad guy vehicles.

Admittedly, they were grabbing at straws, using the Kiowa’s as gunships, but it had been done before and the Warrior model was well equipped to serve in that capacity temporarily. When he could more of the mini-guns, Derek intended to manufacture more of the mini-gun modules to equip the Apaches. But for now, he had to make do, again.

o

They had enough daylight left for a single flight and the 14 Kiowa’s and their accompanying Apaches raked the advancing infantry units. Before they finished, all of the enemy vehicles were destroyed and almost half of the troops were shot to hell. One of the pi-

lots estimated that there were still somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 of the enemy who had made it to cover. By this time the pilots were exhausted and rather than mount another attack, Derek decreed that they should call it a night.

The last action had taken place about 6 miles south of the compound, barely 2 miles south of The Farm's southern border. They were bundled up tight and most of the people not on guard duty curled up in a sleeping bag or blanket next to the wall, ready to respond immediately when the attack came. It was no long a matter of if the attack came, only when. But the prospects looked good; the defenders were behind a foot of concrete and outnumbered the attackers. Some of the residents were offering 2 to 1 odds that the attackers would turn tail and run.

The Rock – Chapter 16 – Going Bold

The smart people took the bet, calling it easy money. Based on radio reports from the General, Gunny, down in New Mexico, a rumor was spreading that something on the order of 20,000 or more of the bad guys had the chance to cut and run after the first strike against them in Albuquerque. The fools had kept coming despite being ambushed in Trinidad, too. Over the past 5 years, they had built an impressive defensive system, but it had never been tested. The choppers had truly been a Godsend. And the range of the heavy weapons defending the compound was impressive. The M119A2 Howitzers were 105mm and the range varied from 11,500 m w/Chg 7 to 14,000 m w/Chg 8 to 19,500 m w/M913 RAP. The M119A1/A2 fires all standard NATO 105mm artillery ammunition, including the M1 High Explosive, M314 Illuminating, M60/M60A2 White Phosphorous (smoke). It fires the M913 HERA (19.5km) and M760 HE (14.5km) ammunitions.

The guards spotted movement around 3:30am and gave the alarm. Within moments the walls were manned and weapons pointed outward. The guards had the advantage of night vision equipment that most of the residents lacked. The night was chilly and many of the defenders began to shake from the cold as they stood on the platforms peering off into the darkness. It was nearly 45 minutes before someone switched on the flood lamps to illuminate the scene. The bad guys missed their last chance to hang it up and they began to fire from their positions about 600 yards out. The residents began to return fire sporadically, but even with the floodlights, it was difficult to make out targets. The Mk-19's, Ma Deuces, M240's and the mini-guns over the gate didn't really need specific targets however, and they opened up with a murderous level of fire. The vehicles parked along the wall opened up too although the intruders were too close to effectively employ the canister rounds from the Abrams.

Those 48 artillery pieces had proved to be worthless in this particular fight, too and had never fired a round. The residents began calling out to the attackers, taunting them and calling them names. The calls of 'cowards', 'chickens' and 'yellow-bellies' together with and lot more politically incorrect and profane names couldn't be heard above the constant fire of the heavy weapons.

But in time, the remaining bad guys buried themselves a little deeper in the tall, dead grass and the gunners could no longer see anyone to shoot at. In fact, it became almost deathly quiet. There were still a pretty fair number of bad guys hunkered down in the grass about 600-800 yards out, but no one could see them. The bad guys weren't about to stand up and rush that wall either. They were finally reduced to the few hundred people who would rather switch than fight.

The situation remained fairly static until first light when the Kiowa's were fired up and sent forth with their mini-guns to eliminate the remaining attackers. The howling of mini-guns shattered the silence and the remaining attackers threw down their guns and ran toward the wall, seeking mercy or refuge or whatever. Waving their arms, in apparent surrender, they walked, or ran, right into the minefield. The residents got to see, for the

very first time, what those 'Bouncing Betties' were all about. They would later use words they hadn't used in a long time like 'gruesome'. The gunners with the .30 caliber machine guns finally opened up and ended the killing, taking out the last of the bad guys in minutes.

o

It took them a several days to retrieve and bury all of the bodies. No one was particularly eager to enter the minefield and pull out those corpses. But they did it because they couldn't have all of those bodies stinking up the place. Derek didn't use the last of his mines to replace those that the intruders had set off; he wanted to rethink the whole question of using mines. A few errant rounds had struck some of the wind turbines and they found they lacked the parts to make proper repairs. They needed to reprioritize the planned summer's activities.

Bill's partner brought up his portable plant from New Mexico and he set about digging the hole for the fuel bunker in the airfield. Gunny came along and the military commanders sat down to discuss what had worked and what hadn't worked in their defense.

While the overall defense had been a total success, nobody wanted the bad guys in their backyards again. Indeed, there was a lot to discuss. In a way, Derek was relieved that they were tied up in the after action discussion and he didn't have to watch the people removing those mines, one more time.

Meanwhile, people were busy dismantling a water tower to move and install next to the new 9" well that was going in. Bill was standing by waiting for the mines to come out so he could begin to pour the wall. Aaron had people out salvaging those arms that were serviceable and storing the junk to be dismantled for parts. The farmers were rushing to catch up on their planting and had plowed a new, larger garden area in the section south of the northwest section.

Derek reminded Barbara that she had suggested that she might know where to get an AC-130 Spectre. Her response was that the Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base northeast of Palm Springs ought to be a veritable gold mine. There was the 1st Tank Battalion, must be over 50 but less than 100 of the M1A2s. Retrievers too.

More tanks than a normal battalion because they used to loan them to units that went there to practice for Iraq and other sandy places. Then the guest units didn't have to transport their heavy gear out there. The Corps had lots of LAV's. If she recalled correctly, there was a Remotely Piloted Vehicle Squadron; row upon row of M-198 155 howitzers, more Humvees than you could shake a stick at and electronic gadgets galore. This was where the Comm-Elect school was located. There were everything from telephones to radars and generators for all of them.

Usually, she said, there were aircraft of all kinds hanging out there but not permanently stuck out there. They would find Stingers; shoulder fired and vehicular mounts, too.

Sometimes there were a few Harriers, C-130's, F/A-18's, Cobras, the venerable UH-1 Iroquois (Huey), and CH-46's and 53's.

Also, Air Force planes lay over there so, if they got lucky, they might find an AC-130 Spectre or even a C-17. Gunny jumped into the discussion and pointed out that they could make an expeditionary airfield of Marston matting that could be taken up and moved to The Farm or elsewhere, really quickly. Hell, he wouldn't be completely surprised to find a few hundred die-hard devil dogs still there keeping things secure. After all, one of the general orders was, "To quit my post only when properly relieved".

If they could go to Twentynine Palms, why not to Fort Irwin Military Reservation, Derek suggested. He had been there twice to train and between the two places, they ought to come away with everything they could use. The two facilities have a common boundary separating them.

If they changed their plans and went to Palm Springs after the additional 150 turbines and the replacements, first, they wouldn't be all that far from the Marine Corps Base. Aaron got into the tail end of the discussion and he suggested that if they were going to bring back people from California he'd better get Bob and Jacob out hunting for housing. With so many residents as they now had, about the only limitation on scrounging was the number of vehicles they had. Why not use the 40 M-1000's for the trip to Palm Springs, Derek suggested, they were nothing more than a heavy-duty semi tractor-trailer rig.

By the way, Barbara announced there had been an addition to the base's landscape in the form of 9 megawatts worth of solar panels. With the additional turbines AND the solar panels, the electrical needs of The Farm ought to be met for years to come. It all sounded too good to be true to Derek, but what the hell, he knew there was lots of useful things at Fort Irwin, so why not Twentynine Palms? Besides, they needed some heavy military hardware to trade for those drugs. They were just about ready to break and begin their preparations for the trip to California when Aaron reminded the three of them that he'd had that watched feeling on the last trip to Minnesota and Wisconsin.

They allowed as how Aaron's feelings of being watched had certainly proven true concerning California so they would keep the Kiowa's up providing continuous recon. In fact, maybe Bob and Jacob ought to take a couple dozen Apaches with them when they went back to the Midwest to look for houses, just in case. Maybe they should only lower the Threat Level to Guarded (Blue) throughout the summer.

"Gunny, maybe you'd better come with Barbara and me to Twentynine Palms," Derek suggested. "You've been around the Corps the longest and if we do run into a bunch of you jarheads there, you might know some of them."

"Just watch who the hell you're calling names, Colonel," Gunny said, reminding Derek that he wasn't really a Major General and only a Lt. Col. by Executive Order.

Derek knew that Marines were fairly accustomed to all of the name-calling. They were almost terms of respect. Inter service rivalry had been around for as long as there had been different branches of the military and that would probably never change. His Dad had been in the Air Force, although a friend of his had almost talked him into enlisting in the Marines back in 1961. Gary admitted to Derek that not going into the Corps was probably one of the best decisions he'd ever made. Air Force boot camp was hard enough for him and they didn't even do calisthenics because it had been too hot that summer.

o

They were in Palm Springs dismantling the turbines before the end of May and Derek, Gunny and Barbara headed for Twentynine Palms. They weren't about to run any risks and all three of them were in 'proper' uniform. The two retired Marines were decked out in their dress blues and Derek had on an Army officer's uniform with the silver leaves of a Lt. Col. pinned on.

They could deal with explaining the stars at a later time, if necessary. When they arrived at the Main Gate on the south side of the installation, there stood a sentry, just as if the past 15 years had never happened. They did notice that he was carrying an M-14 rather than a M16.

"Let me handle this," Gunny said. He dismounted and faced the sentry down, doing his best imitation of a DI. The sentry snapped to attention and Gunny, who was enjoying the experience immensely, motioned for Derek to dismount.

Derek got out of the Hummer and walked over to the sentry.

Gunny said, "The Colonel would like to know who's in charge here, Marine!"

The guard wasn't a wet behind the ears kid who was intimidated by Gunnery Sergeants or officers, but he was willing to play along just for chits and giggles. There were over 300 families still on the installation, but they almost never had visitors.

Unwilling to abandon their posts until properly relieved, the cadre of Noncoms and a few officers had hung in there the past 15 years. When they'd run out of food, they'd done a bit of scavenging in the Palm Springs area themselves. Hell, they had to live somewhere and the base provided them with more security than they could have found anywhere else. There had been a similar group at Pendleton but they'd lost contact with them years before.

Had not that Army Lt. Col. been standing there, the Lance Corporal probably would have really gotten into the Gunny's face. But, why take the chance?

"The man in charge is Sergeant Major Robinson, Gunny," the corporal replied.

“No officers here Corporal?” Gunny inquired.

“There are several officers, Gunny,” the corporal said, “But they aren’t in charge of anything. They’re mostly Aviators.”

“Well, get Robby on the horn and tell him that Gunnery Sergeant William Brazos is at the main gate,” Gunny said. “And, tell him his old sweetheart Gunnery Sergeant Barbara Childs is in the Hummer.”

Gunny intended to have the last laugh now that he knew that Robby was in charge. Barbara and Robby had crossed swords years before when Robby was still a Staff Sergeant. This ought to be interesting. Gunny pulled out one of his treasured cigars and stuck it in his mouth, but didn’t light it. He never lit the cigars; he just chewed them to death. A few minutes later, a Hummer pulled up to the gate. An un-amused Sergeant Major piled out of the vehicle and approached Gunny.

“What the hell you doing in uniform, butthead?” Robinson asked, “You retired in 2003.”

“That’s a long story, Robby,” Gunny grinned, “Say hello to Lt. Col. Derek Olsen. He used to be a Sergeant in the Army until Old George Bush himself signed an Executive Order making him a Lt. Col.”

Robby snapped to and saluted Derek. Derek returned the salute and said, “As you were Sgt. Major.”

“What brings you people to Twentynine Palms?” Robby asked, “and what’s this crap about Barbara Childs?”

Barbara climbed out of the Hummer and squared off on Robby.

“Before you ask, I’m retired, too,” she said, “But, it was my idea to come to Twentynine Palms. We need a lot of matériel for our farm in Colorado and I figured this would be just the place to come. I never figured on running into you.”

“So, is the Col. retired, too?” Robby asked.

Nah” Gunny said, “But he hasn’t been promoted since we dug Bush out of that shelter at Holloman.”

“I thought he was dead,” Robby said.

“Resigned a few months after we dug him out,” Gunny said. “Went around the country trying to get a federal government reestablished and when he couldn’t get it done, he resigned and retired to Crawford. Haven’t heard a peep out of him in years.”

“Then who is running the federal government?” Robby asked.

“There isn’t a federal government anymore, Robby,” Gunny said, “But I suppose that Derek is about the closest thing we have. I don’t suppose you’d have a cold beer for a man dying of thirst would you?”

“So, Gunny, get back to my original question, what are you people doing here?” Robby asked.

“We came to clean the base out of anything usable Robby,” Gunny candidly admitted. “We have a long shopping list.”

o

Robby took them to the Officers Club and introduced Derek, Gunny and Barbara to the officers who were there. There were more, he said, on the flight line checking on their planes. Although there were dozens of officers who outranked him, the Sgt. Major was in charge of the base.

The total compliment of military personnel on the base was 361 plus their dependents. Most of the officer’s had been young single men on TDY to the installation when the strike came, but over the intervening years had married survivors from the Palm Springs and Banning areas and had started families. With the explanation made, Robby returned to his original question. What did they want from the base?

“I understand you have tanks, Hummer’s, LAV’s, some aircraft, a 9 megawatt solar array and lots of munitions,” Derek explained.

“We do have that,” Robby said, “Are you planning on trying to take them from us?”

“Not at all Sergeant Major,” Derek replied. “We lived in New Mexico at Carlsbad caverns until about 6 years ago. Then, when the weather permitted, we moved to Colorado and started a community east of Denver. We have 16 square miles of land with 12 under cultivation. Earlier this year we were attacked in Colorado and Gunny was attacked down in New Mexico by a huge group of bad guys out of California. Anyway, we analyzed our needs and concluded we needed to expand our military equipment. Barbara suggested Twentynine Palms.”

“How big a military do you have?” Robby asked.

“A Division,” Derek replied, “Gunny has two Regiments and an air Detachment and I have an infantry Battalion, an armored Battalion and an air Wing in Colorado.”

“How are you equipped?” Robby asked.

"I have 52 Apaches and 18 Kiowa Warriors in my Air Wing," Derek began. "Barbara has an infantry Regiment and I suppose that you'd have to say we have more than a Regiment of Armor. We have around 80 M1A3s, maybe 60 Bradleys, give or take and about 100 Mk-19 and Ma Deuce equipped Hummer's. I also have 48 M119A2, 105mm Howitzers."

"You do have a Division," Robby said. "But what do you need from us?"

"We want you to move this entire installation to Colorado," Derek said.

"What do you mean by 'the entire installation'?" Robby asked.

"People, equipment, materials to put in a portable runway," Derek said, "Did I miss anything?"

"Do you have any idea how large of a project that would be?" Robby asked. "Hell, we have 60 plus tanks, that many or more LAV's, as many Hummer's as you do, 2 AC-130's, 8 F/A-18's, a C-17, 3 C-130's, 2 KC-130's, all the ground equipment plus over 200 M198 155mm Howitzers, half a dozen Hueys, a dozen Cobra gunships, 6 million gallons of JP8, a million gallons of diesel and enough munitions to fight a small war."

"I'll admit it will take a while," Derek replied almost choking, "We can only move about a million gallons of fuel at a time. It would probably take us 6 weeks just to move the JP8."

"What about housing for our people?" Robby asked.

"We're putting in space for 1,000 doublewides," Derek answered. "And, if you're worried about quitting your post Sergeant, consider yourself relieved."

"I think we'd better all talk this over and get back to you," Robby said, "Where are you staying?"

"You'll find us down in Palm Springs at the wind farm for the next week Robby," Derek replied.

"I'll get back to you in a day or two," Robby said.

o

Back at the wind farm Derek broached the subject with Gunny.

"Do you think they will come?" Derek asked.

"They'll come," Gunny said, "But you did right letting him think he has a choice."

“I’d better call back to Colorado and tell them to make that JP8 tank an 8-million gallon tank rather than a 2-million tank,” Derek said. “I just hope they aren’t too far along with it.”

As fortune would have it, the New Mexican contractor who was going to put in the fuel bunkers had decided to excavate both bunkers before beginning to pour concrete and weld in the linings. Derek, he said, had caught him just in time, the project was moving along faster than anticipated.

The mines were out, by the way, and Bill was pouring the walls for the two new compounds. Everything in Colorado was running well ahead of schedule and Bob and Jacob had dropped 150 used homes and were after another 75. Bill’s second crew had already poured over 300 foundations and slabs and would have the other 200 plus the community building basement and slabs for both tracts in within 2 weeks.

Two control panels were already aboard an M1000 and the towers were coming down a lot faster, probably due to their experience. Aaron was suggesting that they would be ready to head to Colorado in four more days. Derek just hoped that Sergeant Major Robinson would come aboard. With the amount of equipment they had here at 29 Palms, The Farm would be secure from everything, maybe even a foreign invader.

Two days later, Robby was back with several officers in tow. They had dozens of questions ranging from medical facilities to food supplies to the military organization. Apparently, they were satisfied with the answers they received, because they were willing to move. When should they begin, they wanted to know?

Derek explained the exact progress of the construction projects in Colorado and suggested that Robby and the pilots move the aircraft to Denver airport until they could put in an airport at The Farm using the Marston matting. It would probably be a month before their fuel bunker for the JP8 was done, but they would have lots of time before winter to move the fuel. In the meantime, they had homes for 150 families now and were expecting about 75 every two weeks (he hoped he wasn’t lying about that one).

Did they have enough transports for the Abrams or did The Farm need to send down their M1000’s as soon as they were unloaded? Robby assured Derek that he could handle everything on his end except for moving the fuel supplies and solar array. He’d get the matting loaded and send half of the planes to Denver. The remaining aircraft would stay at 29 Palms until the runway was in.

By the way, what did Derek envision Robby’s role to be in Colorado? Training of course, Derek told him, they needed everyone to be fully combat-trained; that meant all of the men and women ages 15 to 45. Just remember, Derek said, you’ll be training civilians, not a bunch of eager 18-year old kids.

o

A week later Derek, Barbara and Aaron were back in Colorado and Gunny was in New Mexico. The damaged turbines had been repaired or replaced and the 'new' turbines were going in quickly. The three old geezers were having a great time running around in their golf carts 'supervising'.

The floor and walls of the 8-million gallon fuel bunker were in and welders were working around the clock trying to get the bunker liner completed so that the concrete top could be poured and the choppers returned to the airfield. The bunker was 200' square and 28' deep. The round steel support columns used enough space that the capacity was almost exactly 8 million gallons.

There must have been some sort of miscommunication however, the bunker for the truck park was 500' by 200' by 16' and was capable of holding almost 12 million gallons of diesel fuel, more than their proven reserves. Oh well. Maybe they should add a wall dividing the bunker into two compartments of approximately 6 million gallons each and fuel the generators with one compartment and the vehicles with the other.

The second tract's homes were all assembled and the front porches installed. There were fewer than a dozen homes left to add PV panels to. The scavengers had cleaned out Abuild in Des Moines and had enough steel building components for the 8 new community buildings. They had finally located those PV panels but hadn't been able to bring them back yet.

Bill was almost done with the wall by the time the first contingent arrived from Twentynine Palms. The F/A-18F's had flown to Denver, and the E's had remained at 29 Palms. These were the super Hornets with the more powerful 44,000 ft. pound thrust engines, at least that was what Derek was told.

The only thing that Derek really knew about airplanes was something his father always said, 'What goes up must come down'. There were more models of helicopters at the Denver airport than Derek knew what to do with. There were Cobras and Hueys and CH-46's and CH-53's. Six models of helicopters mean six different sets of parts. He hoped that Gary's inventory system was up to the task.

The only solution to the fuel problem seemed to be to go ahead and divide the large bunker under the truck park. The concrete for the divider was barely dry when they got a second crew of welders putting in the lining.

At least some things were going better than expected. Bob and Jacob were pulling in the used homes just about on the schedule Derek had predicted, due no doubt, to the large crew of people they employed in the effort. The turbines went up quickly and were waiting for the panels to be completed before they could be brought online. They weren't finding the batteries they needed, however. Inverters were easy to come by, but those golf cart batteries eluded them.

All 1,000 homes in the first and second tracts had 60 batteries each. The batteries were the 6-volt, 400-amp golf cart batteries. The batteries had to be wired in series in pairs to produce the 12-volts required by the inverters, producing a bank of 30 pairs in each home. Desperate to find a solution, they moved 15 pairs of the batteries from each of several of the homes to a few of the homes erected in the third tract. They found that the 15 pairs were more than adequate for a home, especially since they had wind turbines and generators. A crew was assigned to begin moving the batteries when the PV panels were on and the front porches installed.

◦

Robby figured that he'd move half of everything at first and then, when the 361 families were settled into their new homes, the remainder. The fuel transfer was up to the people from Colorado, as was moving that large, 9-megawatt solar array. Although he had some reservations about moving to Colorado, it was a relief to finally leave Twentynine Palms.

He was wondering, too, if the Colorado bunch were really just defending their property or building up to something. Time would tell, but he hoped that this democratic but not a democracy, policy of theirs wasn't just some form of dictatorship. He remained at Twentynine Palms with a defense force waiting for the folks from this place they called The Farm to show up for the fuel.

When finally they had the first half of the diesel tank lined, it was approaching the end of June. Compounds 3 and 4 were walled in, the community buildings erected and the turbine panels installed. Bill's partner pointed out that by the time they had put a wall around all 300 turbines, they would have most of the section walled in.

It made more sense, he claimed, just to put up an 8' wall around the entire section. If Bill were willing, he'd stay and help. Bill was getting pretty tired of the piecemeal approach they'd been using anyway, so the two of them informed, didn't ask, the council that they would going to wall in the entire section.

Given the new circumstances, Barbara and Derek decided to pull the remaining mines. They also decided to move the M119A2 artillery pieces to the southeast area of the section. There was just enough room left in that area to store their 48 artillery pieces and all of the M198's coming in from 29 Palms. The Claymores would be reinstalled outside the new wall, but those Bouncing Betties were being retired. They emptied the tankers and headed for 29 Palms. They forgot to switch back to their 'proper' uniforms and showed up wearing those stars.

◦

"What's this Major General crap?" Robby challenged.

“Our division is essentially a private army, Robby,” Derek said, “And I’m the Division commander. Gunny and Barbara are Regimental commanders and you will be too as soon as you are at The Farm.”

“I am a US Marine Sergeant Major and nothing more,” Robby disputed Derek.

“You’re half right Robby, you are a Marine Sergeant Major. But at the moment there is no US government,” Derek pointed out. I don’t know how isolated you’ve been here at Twentynine Palms, but the country isn’t the same place it was before the asteroid hit Beijing.”

“With all of this hardware we’re providing,” Robby asserted, “You’re going to have a pretty fancy army. You planning on conquering the country?”

“The country?” Derek laughed, “Man you are out of touch. From Texas eastward, all of the states have reformed as autonomous governments. I don’t suppose it would surprise you to know that Texas reverted to a Republic, would it?”

“What about New Mexico and Colorado?” Robby wanted to know.

“There are no state governments in Colorado and New Mexico, Robby,” Barbara chimed in. “And no one has moved back any further north than Colorado.”

“How do you know so much about what is going on around the country?” Robby asked.

“We’ve been salvaging ever since the strike Robby,” Derek said, “That’s what brought us here, salvaging.”

“It sounds more like looting to me,” Robby responded sharply.

“The only difference between salvaging and looting is that looting is taking things from people who will be returning, Robby,” Derek said. “But the population is down to a little over 20 million people, so how likely do you believe it is that anyone really gives a crap?”

“Twenty million?” Robby replied shocked, “Where did everyone go?”

“Simply put, only about 30 million survived the strike,” Derek explained, “Then, the following summer about a third of the survivors managed to kill themselves off fighting over the remaining resources.”

“Well I’ll be flipped,” Robby muttered.

“Probably,” Barbara replied under her breath.

The Rock – Chapter 17 – Summer of 2021

Derek had no intention of getting into a debate with Robby. Debates were for politicians and Derek thought even less of politicians than his father did, if that were possible. By the time Robby got everyone trained and they had the two new tracts fully occupied, The Farm would be approaching a population of 8,000. Even if they added another 9 sections of ground to The Farm, and therefore needed more farmers, butchers, bakers and so on, they were going to have a lot of people to employ.

Although Aaron, Bob and Jacob were technically past the military age now, they had never really been involved in the military in a big way at any time in the past 15 years. Still, almost 5,000 of those 8,000 people would be in the military age group and had to be fully trained combat soldiers.

They loaded the sixty tankers with JP8 and put as many of the M198's on transports as they could carry. This was to be a scene repeated over and over until Twentynine Palms was stripped bare. Derek hadn't forgotten about Fort Irwin, but at the moment, he had more equipment than he had trained users. Some of it would be converted into capital and used to replenish their aged drug supply, but even so, he expected to have over 100 tanks, 250 pieces of artillery, just under 100 each of the LAV's and Bradley's and a couple of hundred weapons equipped armored Hummer's.

Add to that an air unit with fighters, tankers, fixed wing and helicopter cargo aircraft, and the growing fleet of attack helicopters and you had a pretty impressive air force. Derek was in over his head and he knew it. The key to managing an army of this size lay in whom he selected to command the various units. Thank God some of those Marines from 29 Palms were Force Recon, they were going to come in handy.

The Farm continued through the summer of 2020 without further incident. They appropriated the additional 9 sections of ground and when the farmers had the time, they plowed and disked the new fields. By late August, everything but the solar array had been moved to Colorado.

They now had four crews working on the wall around the section and except for needing to scout out additional cement, things were progressing smoothly. Several hundred families had moved north from New Mexico and they only had 93 empty homes in the 4th tract. They were accepting no more new families and the council was worried they would have to build a 5th tract to house the youngsters as they grew up and married.

They now had two additional doctors and two new dentists, all housed in a new 25 bed hospital in tract 4. The three extra buildings in tract three ultimately ended up being warehouses. And yes, Gary's inventory system was functioning very well. The only problem seemed to be that the printout now included over 75,000 different items. To keep things straight, they had begun to put different types of stores in different warehouses and the printouts were divided into categories of items.

Robby had an immediate impact on how they had been doing things right after he arrived with the last shipment from Twentynine Palms. The two warehouses of munitions were immediately moved to bunkers constructed near the center of the section. North of the airfield, at his suggestion, large Quonset type buildings were erected to house the fixed wing aircraft. Bill's partner had returned to New Mexico after the section wall was completed in September and Bill was pressed into service constructing a wall around the hangars.

Bill told Derek to 'get those mines moved' and agreed to extend the wall around the airfield to enclose the hangars. He also announced that he had probably built 6 or 7 miles of walls and he was tired. He was going to retire when this final wall was completed.

Derek was all in favor of removing all of the Bouncing Betties, but Robby, upon learning of their presence, insisted that they bring the retired mines out of retirement and employ them as a passive defense of the airfields. The Farm, he said, was simply too big to defend all of the walls with only 5,000 people.

After transferring the 6 million gallons of JP8 and the million gallons of diesel fuel to The Farm, the tankers headed to Nebraska and continued to haul fuel until the fuel bunkers were full.

The canning operation had been running 24/7 for several weeks, preserving the produce from the greatly expanded garden. There was so much to do that the normal Labor Day celebration was essentially overlooked.

One of the warehouses that had formerly held munitions was converted into a new Divisional headquarters. It had a large communications center, thanks to the folks from Twentynine Palms. The other warehouse was converted to food storage. By the time the first snow came, the exhausted residents of The Farm were more than willing to hang it up. It had been a very long and tiring summer.

o

Though the major projects for the year 2020 were completed, there was still a lot of planning to do. There was, for example the solar array still at 29 Palms to dismantle, transport and re-erect. There was also the question of where to erect the array the following summer.

If the inventory was correct, they had several spot outages in their stores, too. Consumed, as they had been, with expanding their security, moving the people and equipment from 29 Palms, erecting the two new tracts and so forth, they hadn't had time to scrounge. The supply people had generated a several page long list of the outages, and were pressing for an expedition to fill in the shortages.

Although the artillery pieces hadn't been worth nearly as much on the market as the

Abrams tanks, they had negotiated through Gunny for their medical supplies from the South Americans.

Realizing how busy they were in Colorado, Gunny had delivered the equipment and had transported the drugs to Colorado for them. The people in New Mexico hadn't had all that much to do after the battle with the Californians and were beginning to communicate statewide in hopes of forming a new state government.

One thing was certain; the state capital would be moved from Santa Fe to Albuquerque. Albuquerque was more central and a more logical location for the new capitol. In fact, many of the residents from the Roswell-Artesia-Carlsbad and Whites City area were contemplating moving to Albuquerque.

Aaron, Bob and Jacob suggested that after the first of the year, they'd look to the Kansas City area to secure the needed supplies. Radio reports indicated that though occupied, Kansas City was experiencing shortages of food and they had plenty of food to trade.

Also, after the first of the year, they would send a contingent back to Twentynine Palms and begin the massive project of dismantling the solar array. Robby volunteered some of his people who, he said, were pretty familiar with the workings of the array.

It was also decided to move the generators from the basements of the 4 Community Centers and collocate them, the turbine control panels and the control equipment for the solar array in a separate utilities building. They could build the new building between tract 4 and the wind turbines and house the generators in its basement.

Because they hadn't had time to put in fuel lines from the 6 million gallon fuel bunker for the generators under the truck park, there would be no duplication of effort and the amount of piping would be nearly the same.

Derek, Barbara and Robby were busy reorganizing the military units. The armor was reorganized into a 3 Battalion Regiment, the artillery into a 2 Battalion Regiment, and the infantry into a nine company, 3 Battalion Regiment.

The air forces were divided into Air Squadrons consisting of both fixed wing and rotary aircraft, a Recognizance Squadron consisting of the Kiowa Warriors, three Attack Squadrons consisting of the Apaches and Cobras, and a single Fighter Squadron consisting of the 4 F/A 18E's and the 4 F/A-18F's. A new control tower was at the top of the list for the Air Wing.

With essentially 4 Regiments, counting the Air Wing as a Regiment, they could have probably formed two Divisions and thus a Corps, but everyone agreed that a single, oversized Division was enough bureaucracy. And, as it was, the unit headquarters personnel were severely limited, consisting, in most instances to 6 or fewer people. And,

this was just in Colorado, never mind New Mexico. Gunny had essentially formed his own enlarged Division in New Mexico.

◦

Derek was not a worrier, but once idea was planted in his mind, it chewed at him until it could be implemented or discarded completely. Robby's crack about conquering the country was one such thought.

Rather than wait for the next group of bad guys to attack them, why not seek out and destroy the enemy? Perhaps, along the way, they could make new friends and find new trading partners. Derek didn't doubt for a moment that their scavenging days were nearing an end; more and more people seemed to be moving back north. If the radio communications were to be believed, there were several quasi-military Divisions around the country, usually under the control of a former active duty serviceman or a veteran.

Communications revealed that one such Division existed in New York state; another in southern Michigan, a third in Georgia, a fourth in Mississippi, a fifth and sixth in Texas and a seventh in Oregon. That made nine Divisions, probably mostly citizen soldiers like them, spread around the country.

The communications also indicated that many of the Divisions were proactive, seeking out and eliminating those citizens who would rather take than work for what they needed. The commanders of the two Divisions in Texas were calling for a Summit meeting of sorts to coordinate the activities of the various Divisions. The meeting was to be held over a weeklong period early in February at the Dallas-Ft. Worth airport. Gunny told Derek he was in so Derek told him he'd pick him up in Albuquerque in the jet and they'd both attend.

◦

Derek and Gunny, who was now wearing the Major General stars of a Division commander, arrived at the Dallas-Ft. Worth airport the afternoon before the meeting was scheduled to begin. Both men had brought their Regimental Commanders along and the entire contingent was decked out in military dress uniforms as befitted their ranks. Much to their surprise, the Texans greeted them with much pomp and circumstance and they almost immediately became uncomfortable.

It was hardest on Gunny and Robby; they were Noncoms at heart, regardless of their rank insignia. However, at the barbeque the Texans had prepared for the pre-meeting festivities, it soon became apparent that most of the Divisional commanders were non-commissioned officers thrust into the role of Divisional and Regimental commanders, much as they had been. The biggest surprise of the evening came after dinner when a very old looking George W. Bush put in an appearance. A greeting line was formed and the Divisional commanders lined up to meet the former President.

When Derek's turn came to greet Bush, Bush looked at him strangely and asked, "Don't I know you?"

"Yes Sir," Derek replied, "I was in charge of the group that dug you out of hiding at Holoman."

"That's right," Bush replied, "And I issued an Executive Order making you a Lt. Col., didn't I? How are your father and those other old guys from California doing?"

"They're still alive and kicking, if that's what you're asking," Derek replied.

"If I remember right, your father was a bit of a smart aleck," Bush said, "Wanted to know if we won the war on terror."

"That's him, Mr. President," Derek laughed, "He doesn't think much of politicians."

"Are you ready to be President yet?" Bush asked.

"And become a politician?" Derek asked sharply, "Not on your life."

The line moved on and when Derek returned to the table, everyone wanted to know what he and Bush had talked about for so long. Not much, Derek told them, just recounting memories from years before. "Once a politician, always a politician," Derek reminded them.

Although Bush had retired and apparently disappeared from the scene years before, he had in fact been instrumental in organizing the two Texas Divisions and the Divisions in Mississippi and Georgia. As such, he had a lot of influence in the proceedings that occurred in Dallas-Ft. Worth that week.

It turned out that the Divisions around the country were generally more specialized than the New Mexican and Colorado Divisions. Two of the Divisions were primarily Air Force units with large forces of F-15's, F-16's, and F/A-18's. They had even resurrected some of the dinosaur B-52's. The Georgia Division was widely dispersed and included two Naval Task Groups built around two Nimitz class carriers and their escorts up at Norfolk. The fleets were kept on standby and could sail with about a week's notice.

o

The first part of the week was spent hammering out a loose structure forming the nine Divisions into a national Army of sorts. On Wednesday evening, Bush indicated that he wanted to meet with the Divisional Commanders from New Mexico and Colorado and their Regimental commanders.

"I'd like to see your forces consolidated into a Corps," Bush said, "Which one of you wants to be the Corps commander?"

"What makes you think we want to be formed into a Corps?" Gunny asked, "We're doing pretty good operating as two Divisions."

"You go by Gunny, right?" Bush asked. "Well, I'll tell you Gunny, we have additional resources we can throw your way if you are formed into a Corps. Most of these Divisions are like you folks and really just oversized Divisions. I've already had the same discussion with the folks from several of the Divisions and they've agreed to the reorganization."

"What kind of resources?" Derek asked.

"Rail transportation for one thing," Bush said, "And repair of some of the road system. Neither of you are probably old enough to remember, but the Interstate Highway System was originally intended by Eisenhower to be a military system during time of war."

"We have quite an agricultural project up there in Colorado," Derek said, "Would use of the rail system include distribution of our produce?"

"That and more," Bush replied, "However, I don't know if I'd call a 16,000 acre farm a large operation."

"Maybe not, but we're producing over 50 times the amount of food we need Mr. President and we have the capacity to expand that even further," Derek exclaimed.

"And all you need is a distribution system, I'd guess," Bush commented. "Well, fellas, what about it?"

"Who do you want in charge of the Corps?" Gunny asked.

"Like I said," Dubya replied, "That's up to you."

"Well Derek, my collar is too small for 3 stars," Gunny laughed, "So I guess you're it."

"If we're agreed," Dubya said, "We'll start rebuilding the rail lines down south immediately and have them up and running to Albuquerque and Denver by late spring."

A presidential aide was waiting for them when they exited Bush's room. He had a box of assorted rank Insignia for them. Derek moved Barbara up to Major General and put her in charge of the Colorado Division. Robby took over her Regiment of infantry.

The remainder of the week was spent discussing logistics, primarily the distribution of the goods being produced in the various areas of the country. However, the new Corps

commander of the Michigan forces pigeonholed Derek for a conversation. His troops had ranged as far west as Chicago and had run into stiff resistance in the area. Would Derek be interested in joining elements of their two Corps together in an effort to clean out Chicago, he wanted to know?

Although Derek was reluctant, it made sense to him to keep the fighting as far away from The Farm as possible. When did they want to move he asked? The last week of April seemed like a good time to the Michigan Corps commander, so he'd put his Division commander in touch with Barbara and they'd work out the arrangements.

o

At least Derek was out of the direct fray. But, all he'd ever wanted was to command his own tank! Somewhere, along the way, he'd been cheated out of the opportunity and it irked him. He still had the nickel-plated .45 with the Ivory grips and by God he was the Corps commander.

He appropriated one of the M3's for his command vehicle. Even George S. Patton had known better than to do that, but Derek wasn't George S. Patton, despite the actual resemblance and the adopted style. In the end, one of the Texans had been selected to command the Army and Navy, which, considering Bush's influence in the whole scenario wasn't difficult to believe.

Rather than move the solar array, they bargained it off to those Texans in exchange for 16 F-15E Strike Eagles. He radioed back and left a message for Aaron who was in Kansas City, not to bother with the array. They really didn't need the array anyway because when they collocated the equipment, they intended to wire the whole thing together, essentially combining the 4 control panels for the wind turbines and the computerized equipment that controlled the modular generator setup.

When all 300 turbines were running at full capacity, they generated something on the order of 15-megawatts. The generators produced 16-megawatts and the PV panels produced 15-megawatts, not counting the PV panels on the various community structures. The backup batteries in the homes effectively stored 6,000 amps in each home and they could nominally operate the homes for anywhere from 54 to 60 hours before the batteries gave out and they had to resort to the electricity produced by the turbines. So, Derek eagerly traded off the solar array for the 16 aircraft.

The Strike Eagle could be equipped with the following: 1 - M-61A1 20mm multi-barrel internal gun, 940 rounds of ammunition; 4 - AIM-9L/M Sidewinder and 4 - AIM-7F/M Sparrow missiles, or combination of AIM-9L/M, AIM-7-F/M and AIM-120 missiles; 12 CBU-52 (6 with wing tanks); 12 CBU-59 (6 with wing tanks); 12 CBU-71 (6 with wing tanks); 12 CBU-87 (6 with wing tanks); 12 CBU-89 (6 with wing tanks); and/or, 20 MK-20 (6 with wing tanks).

Conversely, the F/A 18's could carry: 1 - M-61A1 20mm multi-barrel internal gun, 520 rounds of ammunition 4 - AIM-7F/M Sparrow missiles, or combination of AIM-9L/M, AIM-7-F/M and AIM-120 missiles; 6 - MK-82; 4 - CBU-87; 4 - CBU-89; 2 - GBU-10; 6 - GBU-12; 2 - GBU-24; and/or 2 - JDAM. As happy as he was to have the Super Hornets, he was even happier to expand his fighters with the Strike Eagles. The down side was that the planes came with Pilots, Weapons System Operators and ground crews, seriously eating into their housing reserve. Delivery of the aircraft was to be delayed until The Farm could provide hangars for the aircraft.

It was also at this juncture that they decided to divide the inventory system into separate lists for the military and the residential population. For some strange reason the other Divisions', now Corps', inventory systems only showed their military hardware. Although the logic of the separate system escaped him, Derek felt that 'when in Rome...' and asked the council to separate the system. Had he considered the matter, Derek would have realized that the explanation was simple. No one wanted anyone else to know how much 'salvaging' they had done. Like Robby, many felt that the salvaging operations bordered on looting.

o

Since they were about to come into an outlet for their agricultural production, the council voted to expand The Farm even further, from the 25 sections of ground to 36 sections of ground (excluding the property north of the highway). Increasing the land under cultivation from 14,720 acres to 21,760 acres would allow them to increase their production by almost 50% and hopefully provide a trade surplus.

Apparently, the three old men, and especially Gary, had been talking to the council, explaining economic theory to anyone who would listen. All the council knew was they were going to have to put in another tract to house the population growth.

On the residential supply side, Aaron managed to trade two trailers of hanging beef and two trailers of canned goods to the folks in Kansas City to cover their shortages, which included such mundane things as spices, shortening, coffee, toilet paper and cigarettes.

The three old geezers didn't think there was anything mundane about either of the last two items. The trip revealed a need no one had previously considered. When they were only producing food for themselves, canning the food in the recyclable pint and quart jars made sense. However, now that they would be exporting, it appeared that they would soon run out of jars. Lids were already a problem, but losing the jars meant losing their ability to can.

Pleased that Aaron had actually gotten him Kool super longs, Gary admitted that he once knew where there was a canning plant that packed corn, green beans and the like. It was located, either on state route 3 east of Hampton or on US 20 east of Iowa Falls. They could just drive around until they found the place he said. On the other hand, Nebraska canned a lot more food than Iowa, but he had no idea where any of the plants

were located. The same went for Minnesota, he claimed. Minnesota was the home of the Jolly Green Giant and Paul Bunyan.

Aaron, Bob and Jacob decided to trail along behind Barbara and her troops and look for a canning plant. They needed more doublewides for the 5th tract anyway and the primary things they hadn't gotten in Kansas City were replacement deep cycle batteries. Some of the batteries were beginning to show their age and if they didn't replace the batteries, it might force them to run the generators, considered a poor alternative in the best of times. Besides, none of the community buildings had battery backups and they wanted to add batteries to the community buildings.

o

The three men from Colorado dropped off in Nebraska to search for a canning factory. They were quickly rewarded for their efforts and the plant they discovered must have been just getting ready for the canning season back in 2004 because there were hundreds of pallets of empty cans stacked in a warehouse. It looked like a pretty complicated setup until Jacob found the manuals for all of the machinery in the plant manager's office library. They got a crew to begin the disassembly operation and moved to Omaha to find more steel building components for the 5th tract. They needed not only the 6 buildings for the 5th tract but also a building to house the consolidated electrical control systems.

When they finally located a warehouse of steel building components they found that the forklifts were all electric, apparently powered by huge deep cycle batteries. They used their own forklifts to load the building components, but put a portable generator to recharging one of those electric forklifts. By the time they had the warehouse cleaned out; the battery on the forklift was fully charged. It was a monster of a battery, weighing several hundred pounds, but obviously capable of holding a huge charge. They spent 2 days scavenging more of those huge batteries. It appeared that their battery backup problem for the community buildings was finally solved.

They were fairly loaded down, but still needed the doublewides and had 150 trucks to pull back the halves of 75 homes. They began to scour Omaha and Council Bluffs, one more time, for good used doublewides. They met with limited success, only finding 45 suitable homes in the area. They began the 500 plus mile journey back to The Farm. Along the way, they dropped off most of their security forces at the canning plant and added the truckloads of machinery and cans to their convoy.

The 5th tract was larger than the other four, extending from the truck park to the southern wall of tracts 2 and 4. Some of the extra space was allotted to two additional community buildings, and there was room for about 650 homes. Their trip had been a combination of successes and failures. While they had the huge batteries for the community buildings, more steel building components and a canning factory, they only had 45 doublewides and no replacement deep cycle batteries for the homes.

o

Barbara had joined up with the Regiment from Michigan and they were in Gary, finalizing their plans to rout the bad guys when scouts reported that the bad guys were on the move to the west. They could hardly believe their good fortune.

They had been preparing for an urban campaign, one of those house to house affairs that were so dangerous. The bad guys were reported on I-55 and they were on I-80. I-55 crossed I-80 out near Joliet and they could bottle the bad guys up at that intersection with their choppers until the ground forces could catch up. They got the choppers airborne and dispatched the tankers and ground crews immediately. Being a Marine, Barbara favored the LAV's over the Abrams and had only brought 24 tanks.

Back at The Farm, Bill's foreman was now in charge of the concrete work and he had opted to put in the foundations and slabs for the homes and the basements and/or slabs for the community buildings before working on the wall.

By the time Aaron and the others got back from Nebraska, the 5th tract was in, utilities installed and two crews were working on the wall. Under the direction of the utilities manager, another septic field was nearing completion, this one would service 1,000 homes, and the generators had been moved to the basement of the new power plant. They unloaded the trailers and headed back to Nebraska to get the remainder of the canning plant.

Aaron asked Derek to contact the folks in Texas and find out just where they could get more of the deep cycle batteries for the homes and to contact Gunny and find out just where in the hell he kept getting doublewides from, his supply seemed to be inexhaustible.

Derek learned that there were literally thousands of deep cycle batteries available from Texas, and they were more than willing to trade them for food, especially canned goods. Gunny just laughed when Derek contacted him, Mesa, Arizona was a retirement community and there were enough doublewides in Mesa to 'supply half the world'.

If Derek wanted to send down their haulers, Gunny would donate his haulers to the cause and they could pull 150 or more homes at a crack back to Colorado. The homes were mostly used, but older people had occupied them and the majority of them were just like new.

The choppers caught the bad guys flat footed and by the time Barbara and the Michigan commander had moved their forces to Joliet, the dreaded battle had resolved itself into more of a mopping up operation than anything else. The Michigan commander offered to stay and help, but Barbara told him that her LAV crews need the gunnery practice and if he wanted to return to Michigan, that was just fine with her.

There were, these days, the good guys and the bad guys and the latter soon became the dead guys as soon as the good guys worked their magic. Barbara hadn't really given it any thought, but it occurred to her that the bad guys, at least in her limited experience, seemed to suffer from some kind of internal disorganization. While they were frequently well equipped, they didn't know when to quit while they were ahead and they rarely withdrew when they were getting their butts kicked.

o

Within a month, the crews were back from Nebraska with the remainder of the canning plant and the cans. Someone had actually taken the time to count the number of cans on a pallet and there were 144 cans per layer and 12 layers per pallet. Whoa, that meant that they were just shy of 2 million cans! They even had rolls and rolls of labels for the cans. All they needed to do was get that canning plant assembled and operating in one of the new buildings and in a hurry. They were already canning in jars and it was going to be close because they were running low on jars and lids.

Derek still wanted to make the trip to Fort Irwin, but until Barbara returned, he didn't want to cut his forces too thin. Nevertheless, he flew down to Albuquerque, picked up Gunny and they flew to California to survey the situation at Fort Irwin. Fort Irwin was the Army's equivalent to the Marine Corps Twentynine Palms installation and was the desert warfare-training center.

Having been there twice for training, Derek had a pretty good idea of the layout of the Fort and they quickly realized that they had another goldmine on their hands. Even dividing the munitions and equipment between the 2 Divisions, they were going to have more equipment than they could use. On the other hand, a bird in hand was worth 2 in the bush, so they resolved to move the equipment and munitions to Albuquerque and Denver, when they could.

They returned home in time for the 4th of July celebrations. At The Farm, the first 195 homes were setup, the front porches built and the homes were waiting on more of the PV panels and batteries for their electrical supplies. The canning plant would be online in another week of 24/7 assembly and most of the community buildings were nearing completion. There was much to celebrate.

The Rock – Chapter 18 – Fall of 2021

The rail lines had been repaired and the roads were receiving attention, just as Bush had promised, by the 4th of July. The spring had been reasonably dry, allowing the farm workers to plant the entire 34 sections of ground. Then, just when they needed the rain, God had watered their crops. From all appearances, they were going to have a bumper crop in 2021.

They had emptied the elevators and transported the grains south, via rail, to make room for the anticipated harvest. While the Texans wanted canned goods more than the grain, food was food and they had begun to ship back deep cycle batteries in exchange.

“We’re looking pretty good here Ronald,” Gary commented.

“Yeah right,” Ron complained, “They still need homes for the 5th tract, they don’t have any more of those fancy PV panels and I’m out of Camels.”

“Is he always like this?” Clarence laughed.

“Only since he turned 50, 30 years ago,” Gary shook his head, “I didn’t know him before then, so I can’t say.”

“You seem to be holding up pretty well for a 78 year old man,” Clarence observed, “What’s your secret?”

“Well, I smoke 2 packs a day, eat everything not on my diet and try to be as cantankerous as possible,” Gary replied.

“He’s just acting normal, Clarence,” Ron dryly observed.

“They’ve got so much construction going on that I’m having trouble deciding which project to supervise,” Clarence said.

“I had no idea that moving to Colorado would turn into this,” Ron said, “I almost miss living in the cavern and the peace and quiet.”

“It is pretty amazing, isn’t it,” Gary said. “The thing I can’t figure out is how Aaron, Bob and Jacob keep going. They’re all in they’re seventies. Hell, even Bill retired.”

“You know,” Clarence observed, “We’re coming up on the 17th anniversary of the strike. I think that we ought to make that a holiday.”

“Holiday?” Gary and Ron chorused.

“Yeah, you know to celebrate our having survived,” Clarence explained.

“Clarence, these have been the hardest 17 years of my life,” Gary countered, “Why on earth would I want to celebrate all of the hard work it took just to survive?”

“It was just a thought,” Clarence replied.

Maybe Clarence had something there, the population of the world had been severely cut, down from nearly 6 billion to just over 600 million. There hadn't been a major war in 17 years either. Everyone was simply too busy surviving. However, they had no way of knowing that all of that was about to change.

Having spent the better part of those 17 years trying to repel the Europeans who had rushed to their continent seeking refuge from the strike's cloud and subsequent brief Ice Age, the Africans had finally prevailed and driven the Europeans back across the Mediterranean.

However, as throughout modern history, the Africans were once again hungry, starving in fact. The AIDS epidemic had burned out and the population had surged, straining the resources of the continent. They were considering moving to North America where the soil was rich and water plentiful and they could grow enough food to feed their people.

o

They soon realized that adding 650 homes to The Farm would require another 100 wind turbines and more generators, about 10, give or take. They were beginning to run out of room for the wind turbines and installing another 100 would just about fill the section. Derek offered to make more room by moving the artillery from the southeast corner of the section to a new area across the highway. But, he said, they'd have to put in another wall to protect the equipment. Putting in the new wall offered Derek an advantage he didn't mention to anyone. They could make it a large area and consolidate their tanks, Bradley's, LAV's, Hummer's and artillery. It should also give them room to move the equipment from Fort Irwin. By relocating the munitions bunkers from the section, they could also free up land for expansion.

Aaron, Bob and Jacob saw opportunity in Derek's decision. With the additional land freed up in the housing section, they could clean out the AOC-15/50 turbines from Palm Springs and be a step up on further growth of the community. There were about 180 of that model of turbine left in Palm Springs and once installed, would reach from the west wall of the section to the east wall and slightly to the north.

And assuming that there were no more bad guys in Los Angeles, they were free to look for more of the PV panels. A few days after the 4th of July celebration, all of their vehicles set out for California, some to haul the turbines and control panels, others to strip Fort Irwin and a third group to begin stripping Los Angeles. Barbara sent her forces along to provide security and Derek rode in his M3, atop its M1000 transport.

For her part, Barbara was intent on making a trip to Luke AFB. Although the primary fighters at Luke were the F-16's, the training command there had several of the F-15E's. In addition, Edwards AFB up in the high desert had a detachment of the F-15E's. She brought every fixed wing qualified pilot she had available to ferry the aircraft back to Colorado.

She also intended on retrieving all of the available munitions and parts available. Although she and Derek were at odds about the aircraft, even Derek had to admit that they needed the aircraft and their munitions more than they needed the equipment at Fort Irwin. The logistics people would just have to do double duty, cleaning out Luke first and then traveling to California to transport the matériel and equipment from Fort Irwin.

By the time the first snow fell in Colorado in early October 2021, The Farm had moved and installed the 180 wind turbines, located and assembled all 650 doublewides, added PV panels plus batteries, plumbed the new doublewides and had expanded their air force to include a total of 32 Strike Eagles and 32 F-16's. A trip to San Diego had yielded enough F/A-18E/F Super Hornets' to round out their fighter fleet to 124 aircraft. 2,376 of the homes were occupied and the population of The Farm was just shy of 10,000. Gary marveled that they had so many people in so small a space. His hometown, Charles City, Iowa had a population of 12,000 back in the 1950's, but the town had covered 4 square miles.

o

Perhaps what Gary had overlooked was the fact that The Farm had turned into a planned community after all. There wasn't a wasted inch of space in the section and the wind turbines and everything else was as closely bunched as possible. Although the homes had a front and back yard, the front yard was taken up by the patio and roof and the backyards weren't really all that large, barely room for a deck. And the streets were barely 2 lanes wide, forcing most folks to walk everywhere due to the inadequate parking.

They had far more planes than pilots, a situation soon remedied by the folks in Georgia who had more pilots than planes. The shipment of several railcars loaded with canned goods to Texas and points east resulted in what amounted to a surplus of batteries and carloads of clothing. In fact, they received so many goods in return for their canned goods that they lacked sufficient storage space at The Farm. It had truly become a logistics nightmare of unimaginable portions.

During its first meeting during November, the council addressed the problems facing the community. Obviously the community was going to have to move several of their operations to new locations. The farm buildings could be moved to the east and the two sections to the east of that used as pasture. It only made sense to move the machine shed with the farm buildings and their only real dilemma was the truck park with its 12 million gallon fuel bunker. That had been a lot of work to install.

The military was occupying the entire section across the road and looking to expand even further because they needed longer runways. The debate lasted until Thanksgiving and was suspended for the holiday. There seemed to be two groups of thought, one group proposed to build a second walled in section of nothing but homes and the other camp wanted to move everything and use the existing section for housing only.

o

The debate resumed after Thanksgiving and those who wanted to build a new housing section prevailed. They were going to reserve an area on the north side of the section to the south for more wind turbines and use the entire remainder of the section for housing. The homes in the 5th tract would be the only thing moved and the space would be converted to an industrial park. Aaron, Bob and Jacob announced their retirements going into the debate and declined to vote on the matter. It was going to be up to the next generation to find more of the wind turbines, generators, homes, PV panels and everything it would take to build a new housing section. Their days in the trenches were over and they wanted to get golf carts and help the three old geezers and Bill 'supervise'.

Derek dutifully reported the expansion of their forces to the people in charge in Texas. The commanders in Texas wanted Derek, Barbara and Gunny to report directly on their activities over the past summer, apparently Colorado and New Mexico were expanding their forces far more quickly than the other Corps had done. Only the Georgia Corps had expanded, adding a third reserve carrier group.

Barbara and Derek picked up Gunny and they flew to Dallas-Fort Worth. Aside from the single infantry Regiment, most of the people in the active and reserve military units in Colorado were armor, artillery or part of the Air Forces. Essentially, Colorado could field a whole Division of armor, 2 wings of air forces, a Division of artillery and their infantry Regiment. By contrast, Gunny had single divisions of armor and artillery, 2 Divisions of infantry and a single air wing. Like the folks in Colorado, most of Gunny's forces were active reserves. But, between the two units, they now had what amounted to almost four Corps.

And, Dubya had his nose stuck right in the middle of the whole discussion. It just seemed to him that 4 Corps should be divided into 2 Armies. Derek, Gunny and Barbara were quick to point out that while they did indeed have a sizeable force, there was no way they could be considered to be 2 Armies. Dubya wasn't convinced, but neither was he insistent.

He suggested that they check out Mountain Home ABF in Idaho for more of the Strike Eagles. There ought to be another 20-21 of the aircraft in Idaho, he told them. But, anyway you sliced it, their forces constituted an Army and Barbara and Gunny were to be the Corps commanders and Derek the Army commander. He, Dubya, would transfer more infantry forces to Colorado and more armor to New Mexico. What did they need to get everything up and running?

Derek had been afraid of something like this and he came well prepared. He started right at the top and worked his way down with Bush's aides taking notes. They needed 3,000 homes, 400 50kw wind turbines, two-dozen steel buildings, enough cement to pour two runways and 3,650 slabs for homes. You could add to that a long list of items that Derek carefully enumerated.

Bush wasn't intimidated by Derek's list, but neither was he an easy touch. Why didn't they simply move to Denver and leave the farmers on the farm, he suggested. Denver had a perfectly good airport, he said, and if they needed space for their Army, they were welcome to take over Ft. Carson down in Colorado Springs. If they would agree to the move, he'd ship enough diesel fuel and propane to Denver to refill all of the empty storage facilities and he would see to it personally that electrical service was restored to the Denver area. The same went for Albuquerque, he told Gunny, he could take over Kirkland AFB and Dubya would provide the utilities. Gunny didn't have the heart to tell George that he had taken over Kirkland a year before.

o

Derek wanted no part of moving into Denver. However, Ft. Carson with the nearby Peterson AFB made perfect sense to him. They would even gain a shelter in the form of the nearby Cheyenne Mountain Complex. The President had a deal and he had gotten off lucky.

Colorado Springs had one of the few local municipal utility companies in Colorado. The Colorado and New Mexico units were renamed the 1st Army and the 7th and 8th Corps. Derek had forgotten for a moment that Dubya was a politician and he'd just been talked into exactly what Bush had in mind all along.

Oh well. Bush was relatively certain that the communications specialists from Twentynine Palms would be able to get up to speed on whatever systems survived in Cheyenne Mountain. And, If Derek got those aircraft from Mountain Home AFB and the remaining F-16's from Luke; he would have a force to be reckoned with. Besides, Bush sort of liked Derek, even though it seemed apparent that Derek didn't think much of him.

Back at The Farm, the news met with a mixed reaction. That their scrounging days were over was good news; conversely the division of The Farm into two communities located about 90 miles apart wasn't at all popular. At least they wouldn't have to move much.

The Ft. Carson and Colorado Springs area had ample housing for everyone who was going to move. The real question was who would that be? Certainly all of the full time military forces and hopefully a large portion of the active reserves; but, what about people like Gary, Ron and Clarence and the original group from Colorado, Aaron, Bob and Jacob and their families?

Without waiting for anyone to decide for them the six men and their wives got into two

cars and headed to Colorado Springs. They looked around until they found a neighborhood that suited them and laid claim to six of the homes.

They had selected homes at Ute Hill, an area normally reserved for senior officers. The homes were nicely furnished too; apparently whoever had lived in them had departed rather quickly, because some of the closets still held clothing. To make certain that no one would take 'their homes' the seniors put signs on the front doors indicating the homes were 'reserved'.

Derek wasn't particularly thrilled to learn that the six couples had gone to Colorado Springs and Ft. Carson without an escort. He was even less thrilled to learn that they had helped themselves to the senior officers housing. But, at least it meant that they were going and their decision proved to be the catalyst that he needed to get everyone but the farmers to move.

Since Bush had promised him fuel, and to restore electricity, Derek suggested that Barbara leave an appropriate force to guard The Farm and they would move the equipment, parts and most of the supplies to Ft. Carson and leave the infrastructure in place on The Farm. In the event of an emergency, The Farm would serve as a forward base of operations for eastern Colorado.

Aaron, Bob and Jacob were willing to come out of retirement to help with this move; provided they said, that Derek wasn't going to turn around and move them again in a few years. Derek told them he couldn't promise anything, but now that he was sporting 4 stars, he might have some say in the matter.

Since they had little of any sentimental value, the three old geezer's belongings fit into a single truck. Aside from their clothes and a few kitchen items, the only things the men wanted to move were their guns. They didn't shoot anymore, but they wanted those guns, just in case...

o

It had taken a full summer to move to Colorado when they were a small group, but the fleet of semis permitted the residents to move in less than two months. The munitions were returned to the bunkers at Ft. Carson and Bush made good on his promises about the diesel fuel, propane, JP-8 and electricity.

They flew the pilots to Mountain Home ABF and they returned with 21 F-15E's. Next, they flew the C-17 down to Luke and ferried back the F-16's. Because Barbara had already cleaned all of the munitions and parts out on her earlier visit, a flight of F-16's was sent to escort the planes back.

Derek couldn't explain that decision, but the little hairs were beginning to stand up on the back of his neck. A call to Texas failed to reveal anything that would give Derek cause for alarm, but something was up, he could feel it in his bones.

As he surveyed his Army, Derek became even more convinced that something was afoot and he began to discount the denials coming from Texas. Why would the former President willingly ship them a full Regiment of infantry if something weren't brewing?

With the addition of the additional Regiment of infantry, his forces now had a full Division of infantry to complement his other forces. The additional 21 F-15E's and the 29 F-16's and 9 more F/A-18's gave him a total of 174 fighter aircraft and 3 instead of 2 Air Wings.

The communications specialists from Twentynine Palms tried their best to reactivate NORAD, but although the equipment in the Mountain worked, the equipment upon which it depended was almost totally out of commission. The computer system listed all of the satellites and their expected life. The dates merely confirmed what they already knew; the GPS System was down, probably permanently.

Surprisingly, two spy satellites answered when they finally figured out how to communicate with them. One of the satellites was in a polar orbit circling the Earth at approximately 116 degrees east longitude by 64 degrees west longitude on the reverse side. The second was in a polar orbit of 0 degrees longitude and 180 degrees longitude on the reverse side.

For the first time they were able to see the destruction caused by the strike back in 2004. It appeared to them as if the geography of the Pacific Rim had been completely altered. There was a large bite out of China extending to the ocean and beyond. Korea was gone as was the southern half of the Japanese Islands.

They finally switched to the other satellite and watched as it circled the globe. As the satellite passed over the African coast in the area that they later determined was Algeria, they noticed what appeared to be an anomaly. They zoomed in with the satellite and discovered a large fleet of ships gathered on the coast. Before they could make any further determination, the satellite passed beyond the coast.

o

"Anyway, we spotted what we believe is a large force of ships on the North African coast," the Marine was explaining.

"What is the longitude of the satellite?" Derek asked.

"As nearly as we can determine, it's on the prime meridian," the technician replied. "Look at this map, General and you can see that that would be the coast of western Algeria."

"Did you get photographs of the fleet?" Derek asked.

“No sir, we really haven’t figured out all of the equipment yet,” the Marine answered. “We did get a pretty good look at the far east, though. It wouldn’t appear that we have much to fear from the Chinese, Koreans or Japanese.”

“Why’s that?” Derek asked.

“They gone, General,” the Marine answered. “China looks a lot like a cookie with a bite out of it and Korea is completely gone. The southern half of the Japanese Islands are gone, too.”

“See if you can figure out those cameras,” Derek directed, “We need to get pictures of this fleet of ships you found in Africa.”

Derek sent out word for Gunny to ‘haul his butt to Ft. Carson’ and for Barbara to meet with him immediately. Maybe those ships explained why the hair was standing up on the back of his neck. Conversely maybe it was nothing more than ships the Europeans had used to get to Africa after the strike. Either way, he wanted to discuss the matter with Gunny and Barbara. There would be plenty of time to notify Texas after they talked and after the next satellite pass. The date was August 1, 2022, the 18th anniversary of the strike.

The seven seniors had found a pizza parlor and with the utilities fully restored in the area had managed to make the ovens work. The beer and soda in the machines had seen better days, but they simply got the people who were making the home brew to put some up in a keg.

Of course, they had to bring their own ingredients, but Gary had always been partial to American sausage pizza so he was the easiest to please. They requested that the butchering operation at The Farm make them some Italian sausage and take a stab at Pepperoni; meanwhile they experimented with the pizzas, trying to come up with anything besides that American sausage pizza. Ron seemed happiest with a green pepper and jalapeño pepper pizza.

“Man, I’ve died and gone to heaven,” Gary said between mouthfuls.

“Humph,” Ron grouched, “Leave it to an Iowa farm boy to like American sausage pizza.”

“Naturally, partner,” Gary laughed, “And next week, I’m going to introduce you to breaded pork tenderloin sandwiches.”

“Did any of you notice all the activity on the post?” Clarence asked. “If I didn’t know better, I’d say that they raised the Threat Level.”

“But you know better, right?” Ron queried.

"It's just an expression you old coot," Clarence said, "Let me rephrase it so an idiot like you can understand. I think that they've raised the Threat Level on the post."

"What makes you think so Clarence?" Bob asked.

"Well for one thing, they closed the gates and for another I saw a lot of the active reserve people in uniform."

"Maybe it's just a drill," Jacob suggested.

"It might be," Clarence said, "But they put guards on the Mountain. I've never known them to do that since we moved here."

"Well hell, Clarence," Ron sputtered, "We've only been here two weeks, so maybe Derek just implemented a new security policy."

"Could be Ron," Clarence said, "But it surely does make me uneasy."

o

The technicians worked quickly to figure out how to take photographs with the satellite's cameras. By the next pass over the African coast, they were able to take pictures. When the Marine technician showed the photos to the three Generals, he insisted that some of the ships had moved. He didn't have any photos with which to compare, but it appeared to him as if some of the ships were leaving port.

"If he's right, where do you suppose those ships are headed?" Derek asked.

"We probably won't be able to tell that for several days," Gunny observed, "But I do believe we'd better inform Texas that there is a possibility that they're moving. I seem to recall that it takes them about a week to get those carrier task groups up and running."

"He's right Derek," Barbara said, "I think you should notify Texas and deliver those photos to Bush in person."

"I suppose you're right," Derek agreed, "You know, the hairs been standing up on the back of my neck for a while now. I sure hope that no one is planning on invading this country, we don't really have much of an Army."

"The hell you say," Gunny exploded. "Darn near every man woman and child in this country is armed to the teeth and doesn't have any reason not to use them. Things have changed a whole lot since those liberals died off."

"I hope you're right Gunny," Derek said. "I'll let the two of you know what Bush has to say."

o

When the satellite made the next pass, the technicians printed off copies of both sets of photos. It didn't even take a magnifying glass to see that the ships were beginning to string out and were heading to the Straits of Gibraltar. Barbara immediately notified Derek and Gunny headed back to New Mexico to get his Corps ready to move. It would take them several days to get to the Atlantic coast if the ships were indeed headed their way.

Bush had put the carrier task groups on alert and recalled the crews the minute he'd heard that there were ships off the North African coast. He could always cancel the recall if the information didn't pan out and treat it as a practice alert. As soon as he saw the photos, he called an alert for all of the Corps. Then, when the news came from Colorado that the ships were moving to the west, he ordered all of the American forces to the east coast. Bush was acting like he was still Commander in Chief of the armed forces. No one objected, it felt good to have someone in charge again.

As Barbara began to load her forces aboard a train that had arrived to transport the equipment and supplies to the east coast, Ft. Carson really began to buzz with rumors. Then, the Threat Level was raised to Yellow and an announcement had to be made.

Based on information-developed right here at the Mountain, they were told, American forces were being assembled and moved to the east coast to repel a possible invasion. Invasion? Who would want to invade the US people began to ask? And why?

Barbara was so pressed for time that rather than answer the questions, she instructed the technicians in the Mountain to feed the rumor mill with accurate information. Historically, the rumor mill was a more efficient form of communication anyway.

By the time they had finished loading they had to divide the train into two segments. The latest set of satellite photos showed not 1 but 3 task forces departing the African coast from various locations. And though they still couldn't tell if the Algerian task force was headed towards North America, it was rather clear that the other two were.

Noticeably absent from the African fleets were any Naval vessels larger than what they took to be destroyers. On the other hand, the US didn't have any submarines to intercept the enemy forces. Then, word filtered back to Ft. Carson that their 69 F/A-18's were being reassigned to the 3 carrier groups to round out their compliment of aircraft.

"I told you guys something was up," Clarence said.

"Well, obviously, you were right partner," Ron admitted. "I'd like to be there and see those pilots trying to land those F/A-18's on the carriers. That's supposed to be pretty hard to do and none of those pilots have landed a plane on a carrier in 18 years."

“What I’d like to know is how come with 3 carriers we don’t have any submarines,” Gary said.

“Are you volunteering?” Ron joked.

“Yeah, right,” Gary laughed, “Just as soon as they install elevators.”

“How many planes you figure they got on those carriers?” Clarence asked.

“Who knows?” Ron replied. “They used to have 7 or 8 kinds of planes and a total of over 80 aircraft, but these days it’s anybody’s guess.”

“Sure doesn’t seem like very many airplanes to stop an invasion,” Clarence continued.

“Maybe not,” Ron conceded, “But it’s all we’ve got.”

In fact, the carriers didn’t have all of the usual types of aircraft. EA-6B Prowlers, E-2C Hawkeyes, CH-53E Super Stallions, S-3B Viking tankers and F/A-18’s constituted the entire air complement of the 3 carrier groups; absent were the F-14 Tomcats and other aircraft normally found aboard the carriers. However, the absence of the other aircraft increased the fleet of Hornets.

Surprisingly, the 3 carriers groups were able to sail in 6 days, beating estimates by 3 days. And as the intelligence photos flowed from the Mountain, and more was learned of the hostile force, the tensions eased. Each of the 3 carrier task groups was assigned to one of the 3 enemy fleets.

As the carriers moved to meet the enemy ships, the ground forces arrived on the east coast and were deployed from Washington southward to Georgia. The word was passed that they probably wouldn’t have to engage the enemy, because the US Navy, small though it was, appeared to still be the most powerful Navy in the world. It sure would have been nice to have some of those submarines, though.

The Rock – Chapter 19 – That’s Not A Destroyer

When someone with some photo analytical skills finally had an opportunity to examine the photos taken by the Mountain, they realized that something was amiss. The ships that the Marines had classified as Destroyers were in fact Frigates. And, there weren’t all that many of them either. The Navies of most African nations consisted primarily of patrol boats and they were not in the photos. However, several African nations were known to have submarines.

Each carrier task group consisted of the Nimitz class Carrier, 2 Ticonderoga class Cruisers, 2 Arleigh Burke class Destroyers, 3 Spruance class Destroyers, 2 Oliver Hazard Perry class Frigates and either a Sacramento class or Supply class support ship. Noticeably absent were the Los Angeles class submarines. The S-3B Vikings, normal used for ASW, were being used solely for air wing tanking.

When the African fleets were in range, the Hawkeyes and Prowlers were sent aloof to survey the enemy. The SH-60 Sea Hawk LAMPS III ASW helicopters, 2 were aboard each Cruiser, Destroyer, Guided Missiles Destroyer and one aboard each of the Frigates, were launched. From all outward appearances, this was a most unusual invasion fleet. The enemy Frigates held their fire and there was no evidence of the diesel submarines owned by several of the African nations.

This was nothing more than a large fleet of boat people, they decided, looking for a new home. The Admiral in overall charge of the fleet said he wasn’t about to be party to sinking ships full of refugees, but the Frigates were a different matter. Those, he said could be taken out by a single flight of Hornets from each ship. When the 3 enemy fleets came into range, he ordered the Hornets launched, equipped with the Harpoon missiles.

Sink only the Frigates, he said, we’re not mass murderers. Equipped with the AGM-84D’s 6 fighters were launched from each of the carriers. As a precaution, an additional 6 fighters were launched as a BARCAP. The moment the first Harpoon struck the first enemy Frigate, the other enemy Frigates, in all 3 enemy task forces, struck their colors. Taken aback by the move, the Admiral ordered the remaining F/A-18’s to hold their launches until the intentions of the enemy became apparent.

He didn’t have long to wait. The Africans were very hungry and very tired of fighting. They hadn’t thought that the Americans even had a Navy anymore because they hadn’t seen an American ship in years. It took the African commander all of 20 minutes to turn his fleet towards Europe. World War III ended after a single shot had been fired. The carrier task groups remained on station until the last of the African ships disappeared over the horizon. The enemy Frigate sank, but not before most of the crew had been rescued by other ships in the African fleet.

The Admiral wasn’t looking forward to reporting to Bush that they had managed to turn the Africans with a single shot. He was, in fact, totally unaware that Bush had a political agenda that had nothing to do with a war.

Early on, Bush's people had suggested that this would never come to a war. Bush had pointed out that he didn't care one way or another; the whole point of the exercise was to unify the country. He had, after all, only been elected to a single term and under the 25th Amendment to the Constitution, he was entitled to run for a second term.

Bush further pointed out that he had been unable to unify the country when he had finally come out of hiding because the country was still struggling to overcome the effects of the strike. This piddly invasion had the effect of unifying the country and by God he was going to take advantage of it and reestablish the federal government.

o

Had any of the Corps or Army commanders known of Bush's political agenda, they probably would have reacted very strongly and in a very negative way. But, politicians are past masters at keeping secrets and most everyone knew that too. When the 3 carrier task groups returned to Norfolk, Bush ordered the Armies and Corps to stand down.

He announced, however, that given the 'world climate' it would be necessary to maintain at least one Army on duty at all times. This would be accomplished by rotating either an Army or two Corps on a one-year rotation cycle. Moreover, one carrier task group would remain on active duty in a similar one-year rotation.

The 3 Seawolf class submarines, Seawolf, Connecticut and Jimmy Carter, which had been christened just weeks before the strike, would be reactivated as would 3 of the Los Angeles class submarines, Hampton, Hartford and Toledo. None of the newer Virginia class submarines: Virginia, Texas, Hawaii and North Carolina had been completed. They, together with the George H. W. Bush Nimitz class carrier, would be completed and added to the fleet as soon as possible. In addition, the 3 Nimitz class carriers based in San Diego, the Nimitz, John C. Stennis and Ronald Reagan would be brought up to active reserve status together with their support ships. It was a power play of massive proportions.

Bush reclassified Barbara's two Corps as an Army and they were to remain on active duty for the first year. Bush also reclassified Gunny's two Corps as an Army and they were scheduled to pull the second year's duty. Bush also promoted Barbara and Gunny to commanders of their two Armies.

In an attempt to placate Derek's objections, Bush tried to name him Chief of Staff of the Army. Derek realized Bush had outflanked him at every turn, but what could he do? He tried to point out that these were only quasi-military units, but Bush wasn't listening.

However, when Derek informed Bush that he was returning to Ft. Carson and would operate HIS command out of the Mountain, Bush became more attentive. There was only one other civilian military unit on the west coast, the unit in Oregon. If he, Bush, could persuade the folks in Oregon to become part of a western army group, would

Derek agree to become the group commander? Derek would be free to operate his command from wherever he chose.

Bush also pointed out that since they had 3 Wings of aircraft in Colorado and a Wing in New Mexico, he would prefer that the air forces be formed into the 2nd and 3rd Air Forces, also under the control of the new western army group. Derek sensed he was losing the debate with the former President so he capitulated after Bush agreed to supply this new army group with whatever they needed.

Since the grandiose move by the former President had essentially left Ft. Carson undefended, Derek did the only thing he could do; he suggested that Gunny reassign one of his Corps to Ft. Carson for the first year and that one of Barbara's two corps cover New Mexico the following year when Gunny's Army was on active duty.

o

Derek and Gunny returned to their AOR's and Barbara stayed on the east coast. At least Bush hadn't tried to strip them of the F/A-18's, yet. All of their aircraft and crews were permitted to return to Colorado and New Mexico. It had all been so simple before Bush had come out of retirement and began acting as if he were still President!

On the flight back from Dallas-Ft. Worth, Derek told Gunny that he wouldn't be a bit surprised if Bush tried to reorganize the federal government, again, and run for President a second time.

Gunny didn't agree with Derek; Bush, he said, was too old to be President. Bush, he pointed out, was almost as old, perhaps older than Reagan had been when he'd left office and Reagan had been the oldest President in the history of the country.

Back at Ft. Carson, the Committee of Seven, as the retired men called themselves, had gathered to discuss recent events. When they had moved into the Colorado Springs area, it had taken less than two days to reestablish the phone system, and it had been a joint effort by the three former phone company men and the network staff.

Bob was promoting a program of reestablishing telephone communications. Although the communication satellites were all down, there were thousands of miles of fiber optic communications lines they could use. All of that competition between MCI, Verizon, Qwest, and SBC had resulted in a needless duplication of lines. Give them a couple of months, he suggested, and they could connect to New Mexico and perhaps even Texas.

"We're too old to be out rebuilding the phone system," Clarence said.

"Maybe," Bob countered, "But there are not many people around who know how the system works. If we don't do it, who else can?"

“I’ll come along and supervise,” Gary volunteered.

“There’s all those communication specialists from Twentynine Palms,” Ron reminded them, “I’ll bet that if we get them involved, we can do it.”

“How are you going to power this system?” Clarence asked. “Phones use electricity.”

“Well, we used those deep cycle forklift batteries out on The Farm for the community buildings,” Aaron pointed out, “If we can salvage some of those from up in the Denver area and locate some solar panels, we ought to be able to put up a system that is fully automatic.”

“Besides,” Jacob jumped in, “Maybe some of the other military folks would help. They’re going to benefit the most from having the phone system back on line.”

When Derek arrived at Ft. Carson the Committee greeted him. They explained their idea to him and asked for his help. Derek realized that this was to perfect opportunity to test Bush’s promise to supply his new army group with whatever they needed. Derek asked the old men to make a survey of that they needed and he would try and get it from Bush.

o

It was almost as if they’d been given a new lease on life. Accustomed as they were to working, Aaron, Bob, Jacob and Bill had grown tired of retirement quickly. They assembled a staff of network specialists, Marine communications people and the scroungers went to work on the phone system.

They allowed Ron, Clarence and Gary to tag along to ‘provide security’ and ‘supervise’. Within a month, they had most of the systems between Colorado Springs and Albuquerque back online. There was a bottleneck in Pueblo, but Derek contacted Texas and within days, the equipment they needed arrived by C-130. Meanwhile, The Texans worked to extend their system westward to connect with the system in Albuquerque.

By October of 2022, the only part of the inhabited country that wasn’t hooked in to the telephone system was the group in Oregon and they were close.

Back on The Farm, they had expanded even further, adding an additional 13 sections of farmland. The folks running the canning operation, the butchers and a group of scroungers had stayed behind. The sole mission of the scroungers there on the farm was to provide more cans and lids. Much of the farming operation had been mechanized and they were nearing the capacity of their canning operation.

They put out a call for help for more canning equipment and back at Ft. Carson their only problem was how to get the second and third canning lines from the Nebraska opera-

tion to The Farm. Most everyone with experience in dismantling and reassembling the previous line was with Barbara on the east coast, playing soldier.

It ultimately fell to Derek to try and resolve the problem. He called Texas and requested that Barbara's command be rotated back to Colorado early, so that he could move the canning lines from Nebraska to Colorado. Inevitably, what had been a small issue made its way up the chain of command until it landed on Bush's desk. Bush was unwilling to consider releasing Barbara's Army, but he was more than willing to supply people to move the lines.

That was all well and good, Derek told Bush, but with the two new lines up and operating, they would be short on cans and lids. No problem, Bush told Derek, they'd simply move an aluminum can plant to The Farm and they could make their own cans and lids.

"What about aluminum to make the cans from?" Derek asked.

"Anything you need," Bush replied.

"What are you getting out of all this generosity?" Derek pressed.

"Nothing," Bush answered. "By the way, you know that I'm planning on running for a second term as President, don't you?"

"I had no idea," Derek replied. "When is this all going to take place?"

"Next spring," Bush replied. Derek could feel the smile on Bush's face. You could never trust a politician who smiled all the time. "Anyway, I was hoping you'd put in a good word with everyone in your command."

"I'll speak to them about it," Derek promised.

"Anything else I can do for you folks up in Colorado?" Bush asked.

"No Sir," Derek replied, "I think you've done quite enough."

o

"So anyway Dad," Derek said to Gary, "I think the SOB was trying to get me to order our people to vote for him."

"But he didn't say that, right?" Gary asked.

"Right," Derek replied, "But why else would he be giving us everything we need?"

"You ought to do what he wants, Derek." Gary responded.

“Huh? You mean tell everyone to vote for him?” Derek was getting upset.

“No, tell everyone that he implied you should order them to vote for him,” Gary explained.

“If I did that, no one would vote for him,” Derek retorted.

“Exactly,” Gary grinned, “He never did say whether we won the war on terror, did he?”

◦

Eventually, Derek reported to Bush that he’d had a word with his people. He was calling to report that the two canning lines had been installed together with the aluminum can plant. He told Bush how much he appreciated the aluminum sheeting, too.

Two could play at this game; Derek had done exactly as his father had suggested and from the reactions to his announcement, Bush wouldn’t be getting a single vote from Colorado, New Mexico or Oregon.

As the spring of 2023 merged into summer, Barbara returned with her command. Gunny had decided that his militia could handle any security issues that came up and told Derek that it wasn’t necessary for Barbara to send forces to New Mexico.

Derek explained to Barbara about Bush’s ploy to get him to intimidate their forces to vote for him in the upcoming election. Barbara just laughed, she’d already gotten the word and had repeated Derek’s announcement. None of her people, she said, were interested in that has been being President again.

The world was a different place. People had survived an asteroid strike and the Ice Age it had triggered. Yet, in the end, people were just the same. The key to survival had turned out to be preparedness and a willingness to do what it took to survive.

The Rock – Chapter 20 – Epilogue

It looked like Bush was a shoo-in; he'd been busy trying to buy everyone's vote. He had made, 'one little mistake'. In trying to buy the votes from the newly formed western army group, he'd made an enemy.

Derek now knew exactly why his father detested politicians so much. He wanted no part of politics, but neither did he relish the idea of Bush regaining the Presidency. He had the perfect candidate; a military veteran with 30 years' service.

The minute Derek raised the name everyone in the western army group was immediately in favor of supporting his candidate. It turned out that many approved of the new candidate; no one liked to feel like they had been bought. In the election held on June 4, 2023, Barbara Childs was elected the 44th President of the United States, having campaigned for less than a month.

© 2011, Gary D. Ott